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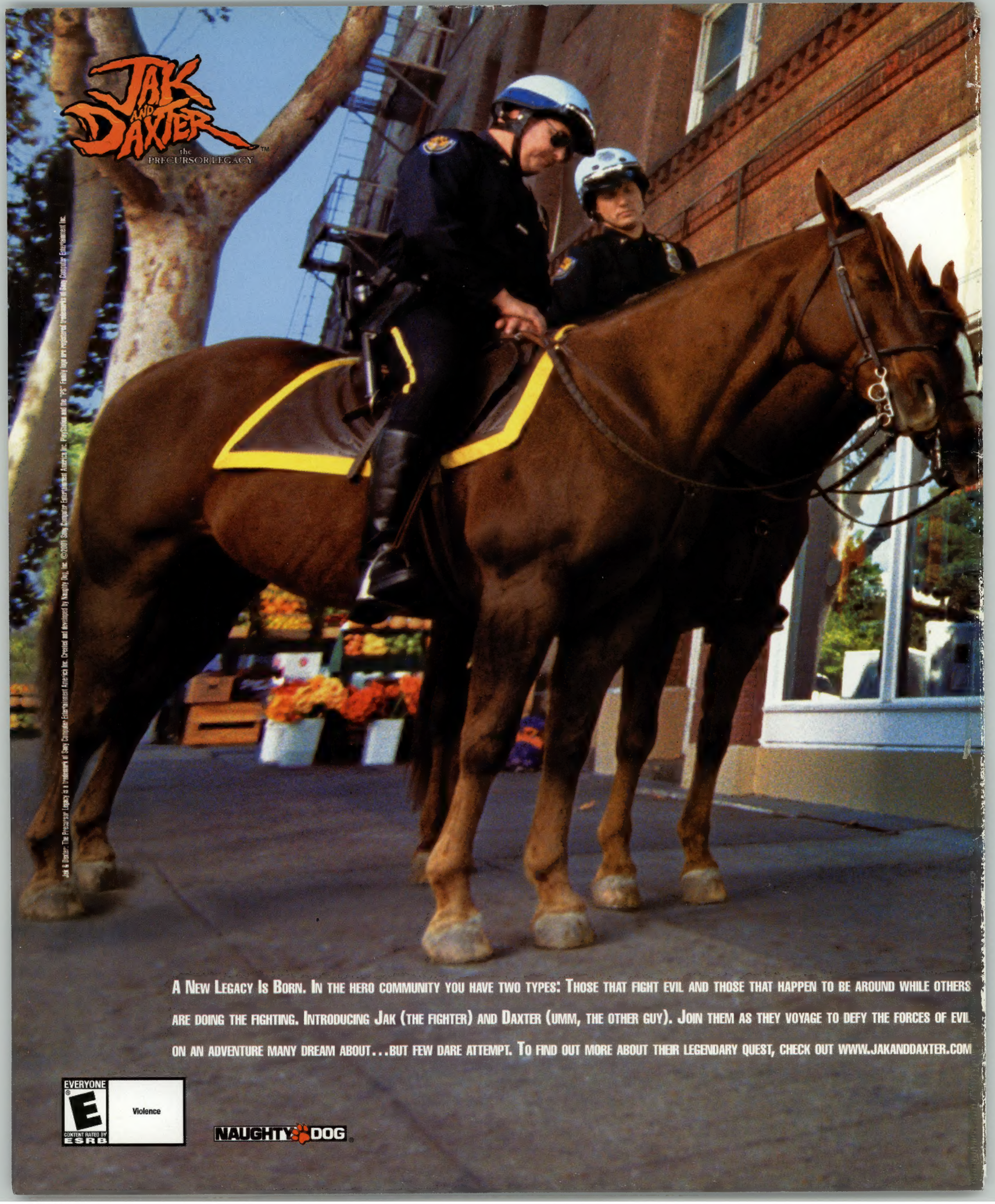
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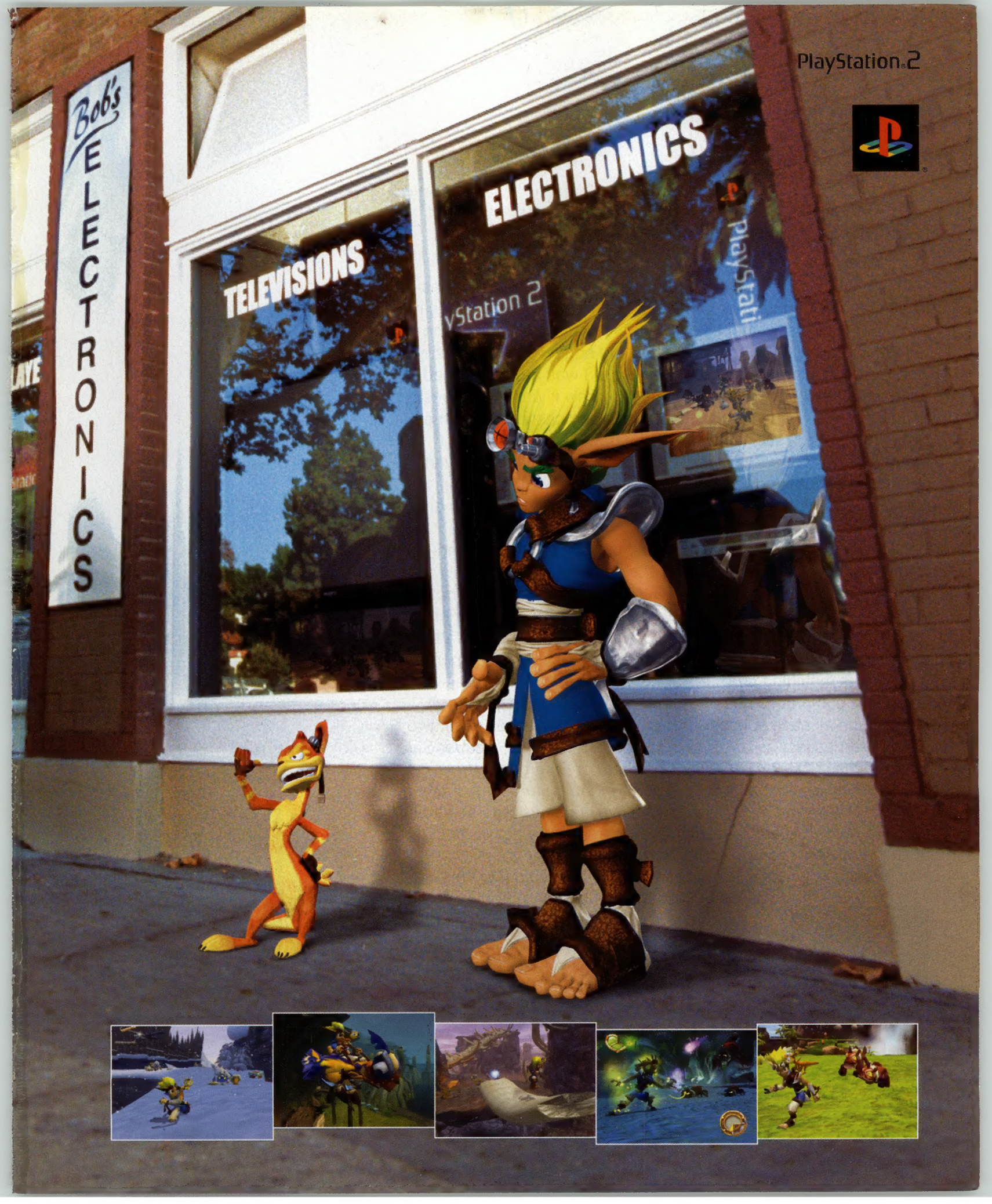


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play

vol. 1 issue 2

Masters of the system

This month's cover story hits particularly close to home. It was the Sega Genesis that prompted my decision to make videogames my life rather than just a hobby. My Atari 7800 and the NES laid the foundation, but Sega pushed me over the edge. Needless to say, when Sega bid farewell to the console biz, I was a bit saddened and dismayed. In the back of my mind, I knew it was for the best, especially after *Jet Grind Radio* for the Dreamcast didn't set the world on fire—but still, I'd never hold a new Sega pad again. I thought *Jet Grind* (and *Shenmue*, for that matter) would convert hundreds of thousands and finally tip the scales, but for some reason the Sega machine just couldn't loosen Sony's mighty grip on 20th century gaming.

Now, just over a year later, we stand on the threshold of neo-Sega gaming, and I am floored by their commitment to quality and business savvy. *Gunvalkyrie*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Shenmue II* are all Xbox exclusives and, as a result, unforgettable experiences (okay, I'm being presumptuous on *Shenmue*, but c'mon). Rather than develop to the lowest common denominator and then port up, Sega is matching specific games with specific hardware—a lead more companies need to follow. The Xbox, PS2, and GameCube all have specific strengths and weaknesses (well, two have weaknesses) as exemplified by exclusives like *Halo*, *Jet Set*, *Gunvalkyrie*, *DOA 3*, *Devil May Cry*, *State of Emergency*, *Jak and Daxter*, *Pikmin* and the upcoming *StarFox Adventures*. All of these games are tailor-made for their respective consoles, and as a result, they are all AAA titles. If *Devil* and *State* eventually get ported, at least you know you got all the game possible for your PS2. The moral of the story? Ports can be evil and misleading unless they're juiced accordingly when being adapted to a more powerful console. Just look at the difference between Acclaim's Sega ports (sorry, the deal was made before Peter Moore took office; thanks Bernie) and the new breed of Sega games. If Sega continues to manage its properties in this manner, they will undoubtedly take their rightful place as software king, only across all platforms—and that, my friends, is truly reason to celebrate.

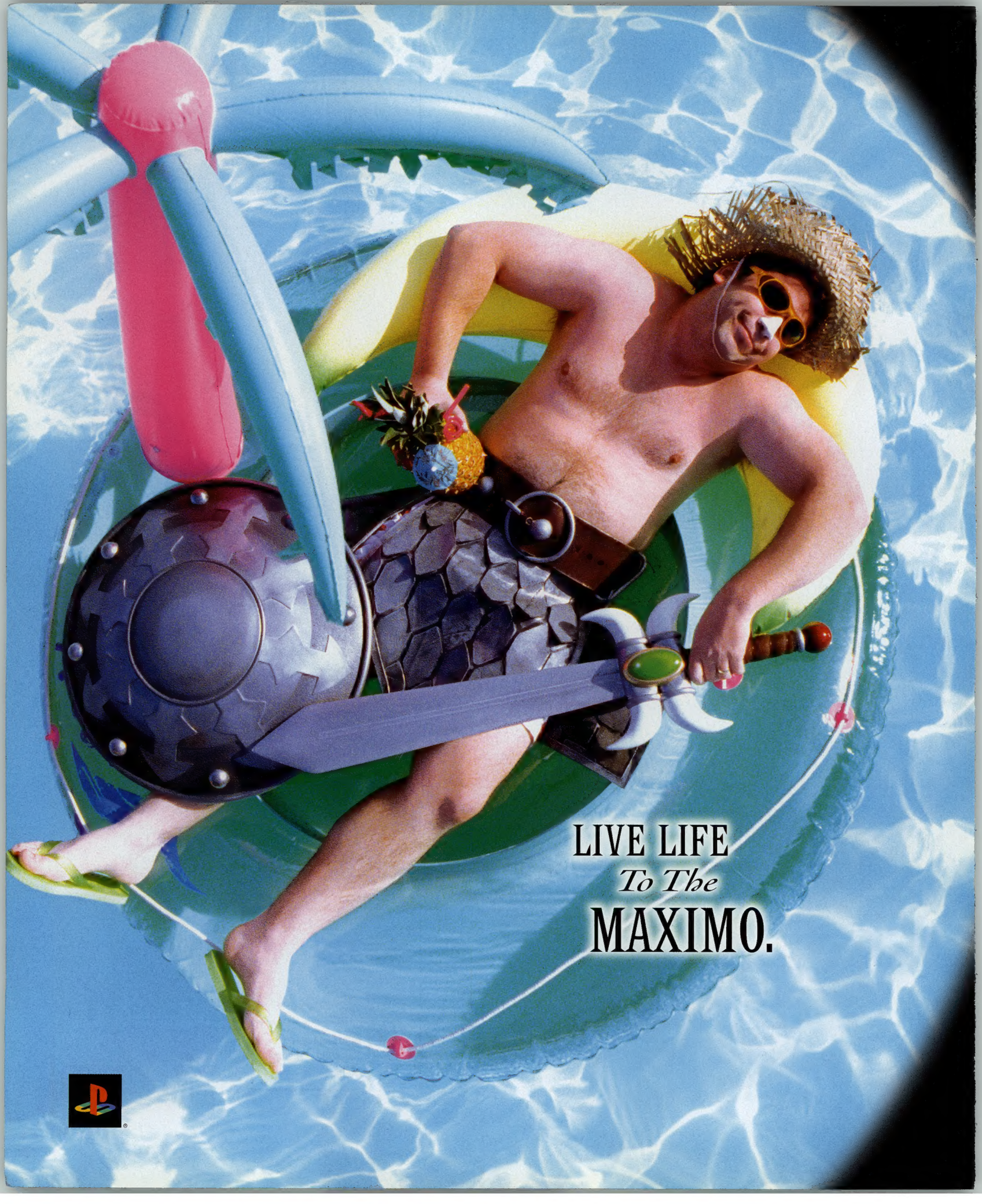


DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"*Gunvalkyrie*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Shenmue II* are all Xbox exclusives and, as a result, unforgettable experiences (okay, I'm being presumptuous on *Shenmue*, but c'mon)"



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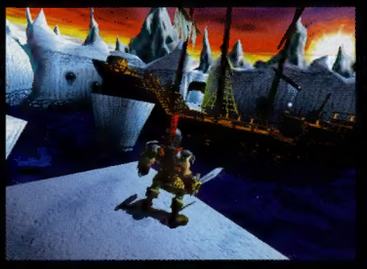




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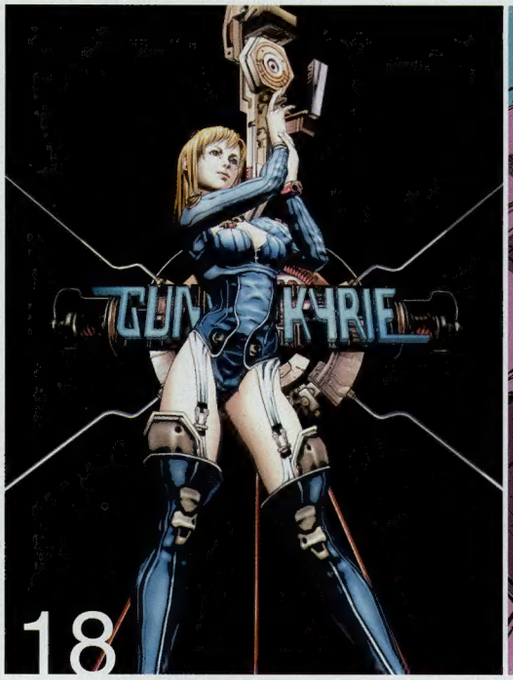
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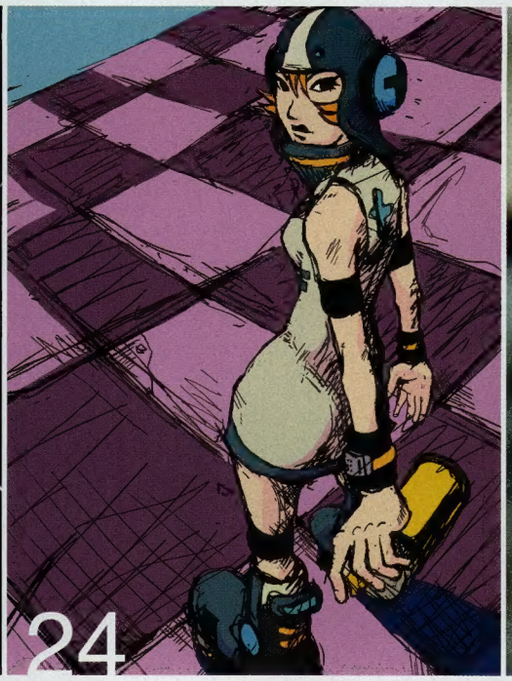
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planet moon
and britney spears?

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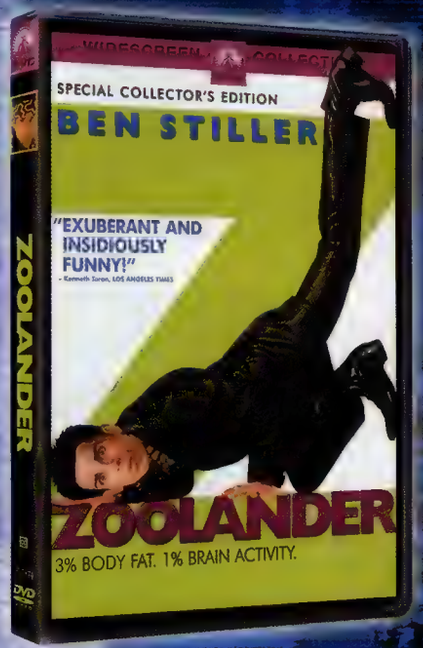
LINKIN PARK IT IN THE MICROSOFT LOT



An Xbox, three games, and an extra controller go a long way these days. I don't see *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Gunvalkyrie*... it's a raw deal!

In the most unlikely pairing since Eminem and Elton John, Linkin Park, arguably the best new band working today, has boarded the Xbox bandwagon (time to replace the old PSone on the tour bus) with the express purpose of reaching each other's core audience. The band will kick-off the project on their Projekt: Revolution tour, which got underway January 19th. The multi-genre tour also features Adema, Cypress Hill, and DJ–ZTRIP. Microsoft will paint the place green with substantial promotional support while the band helps convert vast, impressionable minions to join the Xbox nation through tour signage, logos on merchandise, and autographed consoles for radio promos. Microsoft has sold 1.5 million-plus Xbox units in North America so far, while Linkin Park has sold almost 5 million copies of *Hybrid Theory.* In other words, Microsoft... smart. What do we think of all this blatant commercialism? Bring it on! Why wait decades like T-Rex and Bowie when you can deposit the check now! If it were N'Sync, we'd be freaking out. But this is cool.

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ink

THE BITCH IS BACK

ADV Films has announced details surrounding their second US/Asia co-venture, having selected the production team for the animated adaptation of Chaos Comic's *Lady Death*—the single most do-able chick that might kill you afterwards. Co-producers Carl Macek and Andy Orjuela are bound for Asia where they'll work with SunMin Pictures (with credits including *Batman: The Animated Series* and *The Maxx* for MTV, among others) under the supervision of director Young H. Sang, bringing the gothic heroine's story to life. The original screenplay, written by Macek, revisits the origins of *Lady Death*, remaining true to the original story by Brian Pulido, although Orjuela has introduced new plot points and re-designed key characters to juice things up for the film. The most compelling aspect of the production is exec producer John Ledford's vision for the project. Rather than simply transition *Lady Death* into a traditional anime mold, the goal is to respectfully tap the talents and resources of the entire international team. Hey, just so the boobs bounce.



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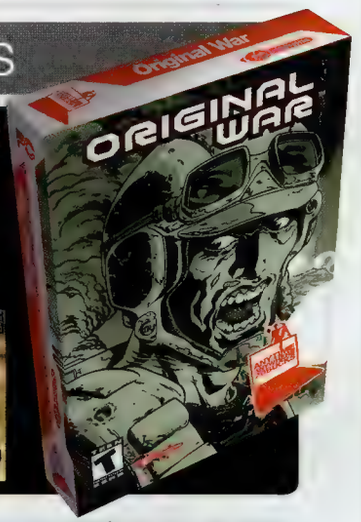
SAVE MONEY ON VIRGIN...GAMES

Jumping back into the PC market after a long hiatus, Virgin has a plan that should have PC gamers clamoring for their keyboards. Their initial three offerings—*Codename: Outbreak*, *Original War* and *Screamer 4x4*—will all retail for the Ron Poppeil-like price of just $20. All they ask is that you tell a friend. The hook is that the low price doesn't equate to budget games, but, rather, less box. Instead of the usual Liberaci-style PC box, Virgin has cut the fat and are offering their games in smaller, simpler packages—the new, emerging trend among PC games. It's understandable; you can dock a jet ski in most PC-boxes.









ONE GIANT STEP FOR LUCASARTS



"After tonight, I'm blowing off the choir and going to America to make videogames... you guys in?"

In the single best move the company has made since it began producing games, LucasArts has chosen Planet Moon to create an "original, humorous" action title for next-generation consoles under the Lucas auspice. Expected to release in 2003 (er, okay), no details were given regarding the game itself, but coming from the twisted minds that helped make *Earthworm Jim* for Sega Genesis a smash hit—and *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, one of the funniest, most immersive 3D action-adventure games ever—it's fair to assume it will deliver on all fronts. Blatantly honest (and hyper-talented) Nick Bruty, President and Co-founder of Planet Moon, said "our past games have focussed on two things: being late and over budget."



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NEWSBYTES

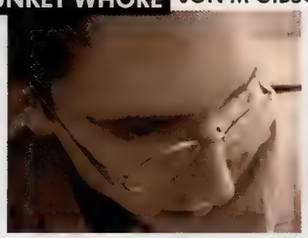
. . . Soon you'll be able to **play with Britney Spears in the privacy of your bedroom**—courtesy of THQ. This spring, the reigning queen of pop will make her PS2 debut with *Britney's Dance Beat*, a **surprisingly addicting rhythm game reminiscent of *Dance Dance Revolution***—except this one features the curvaceous 20-year-old in plenty of compromising positions. Game Boy Advance and PC owners should bust-a-groove as well . . . Due to over-whelming demand, **Working Designs has re-released *Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete* with two pieces of "limited edition" fan art** printed on each game disc. 250,000 first-edition box sets were originally released. Consequently, the PC version of *Lunar* was scraped . . . Scooby Doo and his intrepid cohorts—Shaggy, Velma, Daphne and Fred—will be entering the 21st Century in more ways than one. THQ will release a next-gen mystery in their ever-expanding franchise this summer for PS2 and GameCube; and **Kids' WB will unveil the *All New Scooby Doo! The Animated Series* (working title) for the 2002 fall season**. *Zoinks!*

. . . After spending an extended period of time in video-game limbo, **Acclaim will finally release *Shadow Man: 2econd Coming* for PS2 in late February**. The long-awaited sequel marks the return of LeRoi and his "Deadside" alter ego, Shadow Man, as they combat a group of satanic demons that have been masquerading as humans for the past 2,000 years . . .



(clockwise from top left) Britney, LeRoi and Scooby—all creeping onto a console near you in '02.

JUNKET WHORE JON M GIBSON



cookies 'n cream

To quote Paul Newman: "Going to a press junket is like being double-parked at a whorehouse." Here's why (well, kinda):

You get an invitation to indulge in life's pleasures for a few days: food, alcohol, and miscellaneous forms of entertainment (but that doesn't include private sessions with Vegas showgirls—or at least we haven't learned how to sketch that as a tax write-off). Immediately, your eyes light up. "An all expenses paid trip to Hawaii," you shout, jamming dirty laundry into your worn-to-shreds suitcase. After logging a few thousand frequent flyer miles, you're in the middle of the beach drinking martinis by the dozen and snapping your fingers at a local Hula dancer to get you another lei.

But wait—there's *one* pinch. Well, at least in Hollywood.

That's why the game industry glows in comparison to the film crowd. There is no pretension, no pressure from snooty public relations reps to perform. Within the gaming community, there is a respected separation, one that divides joypads and joyrides. During the day, handfuls of video-game journalists gather in conference rooms and development houses to view the best and brightest (and not so blazing) videogame fare. At night, there exists a booming presence of techno clubs, scantily clad ladies, and endless open bars (at which, I generally order whiskey sours, stare at the scantily clad ladies, and attempt to shuffle my feet into some sort of rhythm).

On the other side of the universe, in Tinsel Town, publicists trap you in hotel rooms until you sign away your soul. Once you accept their invitation (one that promises celebrity interviews and advance screenings of movies like *See Spot Run*), you're literally a marionette—a "quotable puppet," as I often joke with friends. You've seen the ads: "The best movie this millenium," boasts Robert Toolset of WXTB-FM Radio. But, honestly, who's ever heard of Mr. Toolset? Is his show broadcast from the moon? Film journalists like him—and there are *many*—are bought every day of the week; all it takes is a hotel room and an endless buffet.

Which brings me to the unassuming antics of *this* industry. One such junket—at which several journalists test-drove Tecmo's newest entry into the ambient horror genre, *Fatal Frame*—propelled yours truly into an uncomfortable situation. After a night in the Santa Cruz mountains—in a haunted hotel, nonetheless, at which the locals told us ghost stories and preceded by rattling the window shudders—a morning of breakfast awaited us. Everyone was exhausted, to the point of starvation, but *that* unforgettable morning wasn't nourishing by any means. The ride to the airport didn't agree with the French toast and maple syrup I devoured earlier. Crammed inside a limo, screaming violently down the winding mountain pass, I was forced to succumb to a nauseous urge. It was raining hard; and my head was hanging out the window. So, I apologize, Zoe Flower. I hope my cookies didn't spill on your coat.

That's just one misadventure—a 24-hour period of jetlag, traditional Irish fish 'n chips, spooky folk tales, queasiness, and a sleepless night of gameplay. Next month: Vegas kicks and Austin shakes.


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THE STATE OF THE BOX

Ed Fries, Vice President of Microsoft Game Studios, discusses his post-launch impressions, immerging technology, and online console gaming.

With emerging technology, when's the Xbox going to shrink?
[Laughs] The cost reduction is really important to us. We're about to more than double the team that is devoted to cost reduction on our hardware group right now. Actually, we're lucky because another project internally is being cancelled and we get to take a bunch of talent from that and put them to focus on, how we can combine things in the Box, how we can make it smaller, how we can make it cheaper so we can bring the price down in the market.

Initially, what was the internal production cost?
Oh, I can't really talk about what our internal cost forecasts were. We had educated guesses for what different components were going to cost. Some ended up being higher than we expected, some ended up being lower. Now, this is just Version 1.0. We'll do Version 2.0, 3.0, 4.0. A lot of the changes will be really subtle—internal changes—that you won't really notice unless you take it apart. But we'll be able to get rid of a lot of discreet components. Resisters, compactors—things like that that cost money. To really do big changes, though, we have to get some of our partners to work together—Intel, nVidia—where those pieces are made.

Are you happy with the Xbox launch?
I'm pretty sad because we said we were going to do 1 to 1.5 [million]; and we only did 1.5 [laughs]. We were only able to do 3.2 games for each Xbox, which is the best anyone has ever done in the history of the console business. So, I'm mostly pretty upset [laughs]. To me, what's most interesting is, it's not like the other guys screwed up and gave us an opportunity. Sony had a great line-up this Fall, which sold well; Nintendo did everything they said they were going to do. Up against that string, we were able to come in and introduce a new console—which people said, "Ahh, you're crazy"—and sell every single Box that we could make; I think, really show that we can grow the market and make room for another *really* great platform.

So who do you consider you're largest competitor?
My biggest competitor is the TV. What I want to do is get people away from passive entertainment, where you just sit there and have the stuff beamed into your head. I think gamers have really found this amazing form of entertainment. No other kind of entertainment will keep you up until 3 AM, totally focused, like a great level in *Halo*. You know, but it's kind of like a secret club the people in this business know about, but so few other people do. How can we reach out to that broader audience? How can we bring more people in? How can we use all the things we've developed over the last 20 years in building the games business, and take those ideas to a broader audience and make this a true mainstream medium.

Well... games *have* prevailed over movies as mass entertainment?
Yeah, it depends how you want to measure. On a dollar basis, we can say, "Boy, we're really proud of ourselves—we beat box office."

So do you still think gaming is in the closet?
Actually, the Xbox name has gotten pretty mainstream. I have to be careful about where I wear my Xbox clothing or my Xbox shoes. I have to be willing to want to have *that* conversation. But I really think it's still true. I think most of the buyers are men, so we're missing half the population right there. They tend to be 16 to 26 in the age range. Again, we're missing out on a lot of people. Yeah, video games have a higher awareness, but do they have a respect? Are they treated as an art form like great writing or a great movie? We need to reach out to women in a big way, and to a much broader audience through online.

You embrace online gaming, then?
Yeah, I do because it takes gaming from being somewhat of an antisocial behavior to converting it into being much more of a social behavior.

Antisocial, eh?
I think it can be. The thing about TV is that it's sort of social in that you can sit around with friends and watch TV. But when you're playing a game—unless you're playing with multiplayer split-screen—you're sort of owning the TV. There's some kind of games where it's fun to watch people play; and sometimes not. How can we turn that into a more social experience? How can we make it so that you really are interacting with other people? I think, if you look at the trends in PC gaming towards massive multiplayer games and the addiction that surrounds those, it really comes from the fact that there's *real* people out there and you're interacting with them—there's social networks that you can create. It's not just about playing, it's about, "Oh, my friends are online and I'm gonna go get together with them and have an experience *together*." That's a way for us to reach a broader audience.

Do you want to create an online environment similar to the PC, like *Everquest* or *Ultima Online*, or do you want to evolve that?
The PC has been on the forefront of pushing the development online. So, not only do you get innovations in game design—and you mentioned a few—you also get the development of communities that can share, the development of mods, extensions to content.

A la *Counter-Strike*.
Exactly. I think, first, we shouldn't dismiss what's happened on the PC; we should accept it and learn from it. The problem with PC stuff is that it tends to be techie—less mainstream. So something like *Phantasy Star Online* is interesting to me because it's sort of a console mindset, it's a console translation of ideas that were developed on the PC. Can we create an MMP-like game, but within a console mindset?

Even the language barrier was addressed with *PSO*.
Yeah, they tackled the communication problem. Not completely successful, but an interesting attempt. In what we're doing with Xbox online, speech is going to be really important. Just to be able to talk to people just like you and I are talking right now instead of having to type. For a lot of people, typing is not a skill they have—even for writers and programmers.

Hey, I even cheated in typing class.
[Laughs] So it's things like that that can open it to a broader audience, and some of those ideas have yet to catch on with the PC. And that's the thing with the console world: Because it's a closed system that you have a lot more control over, you can really dictate a level of quality. We can say broadband only. We can say we're not going to have latency problems that other people have—we're not going to have bandwidth limitations that other people have—so we can insure that base level of quality. That is the groundwork we need to then build on top of. And when I think about that—god, we've done so little in online, honestly. We've translated first-person shooters into online; we've translated RPGs into online. We haven't really, at its roots, asked what online is all about and developed new concepts that are really tied to that.

Indeed. Innovation is welcome.
Yeah. And that's fine—that's sort of what happened when we went from 2D to 3D. It took us a while to figure out. Well, okay, we shouldn't obviously try and directly translate things from 2D and 3D—and you learn they don't work, and you learn what does work, and then you go on.

In regards to connectivity, where do you see Xbox leaning in way of LAN play?
I'm glad we put in LAN play. I think of LAN as a temporary solution as we go to broadband and online services. That's really where we want to go, so this is a small step in that direction.

NEXT MONTH: PART 2 OF OUR ED FRIES INTERVIEW

Crash is going small in a huge way.



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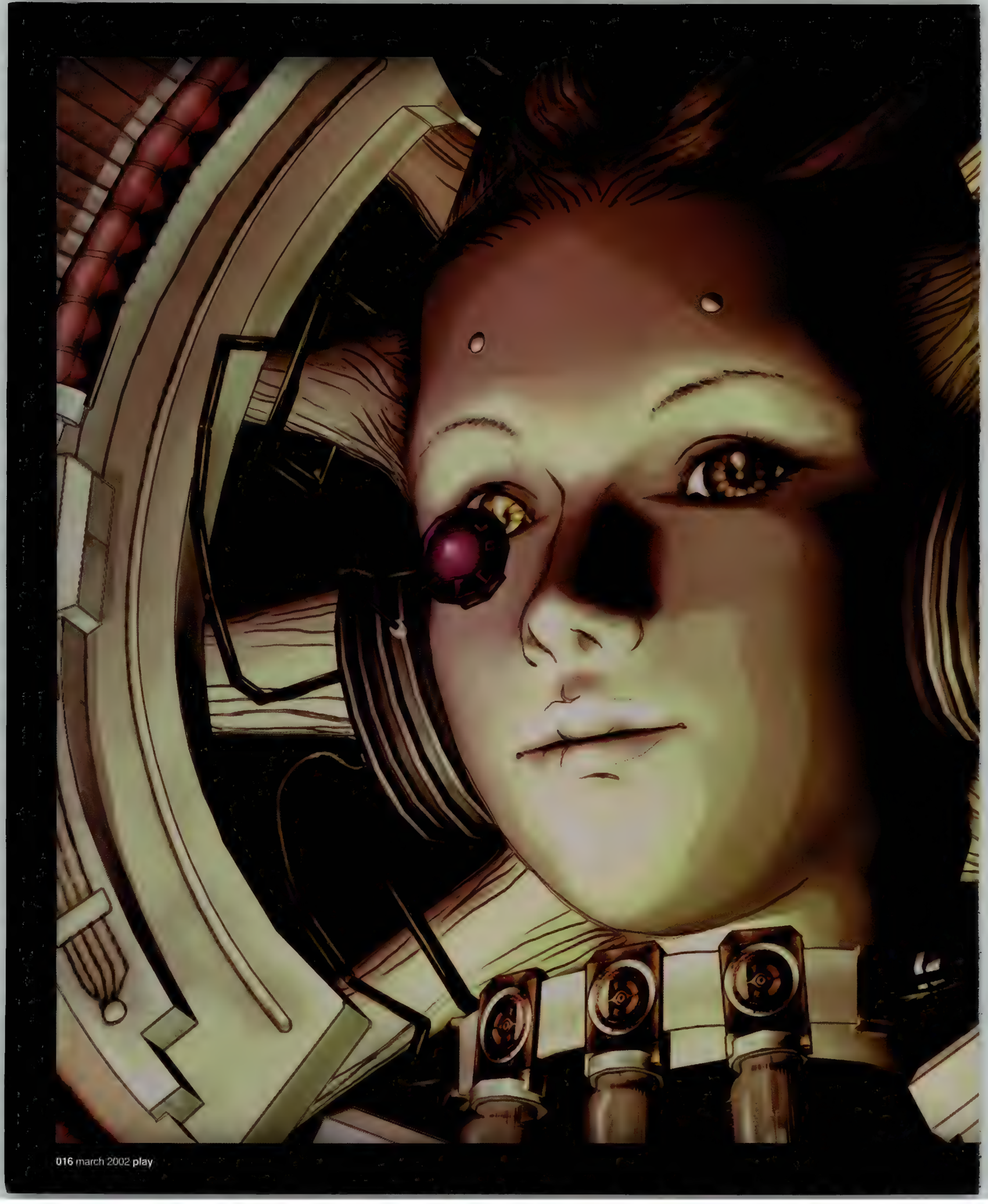


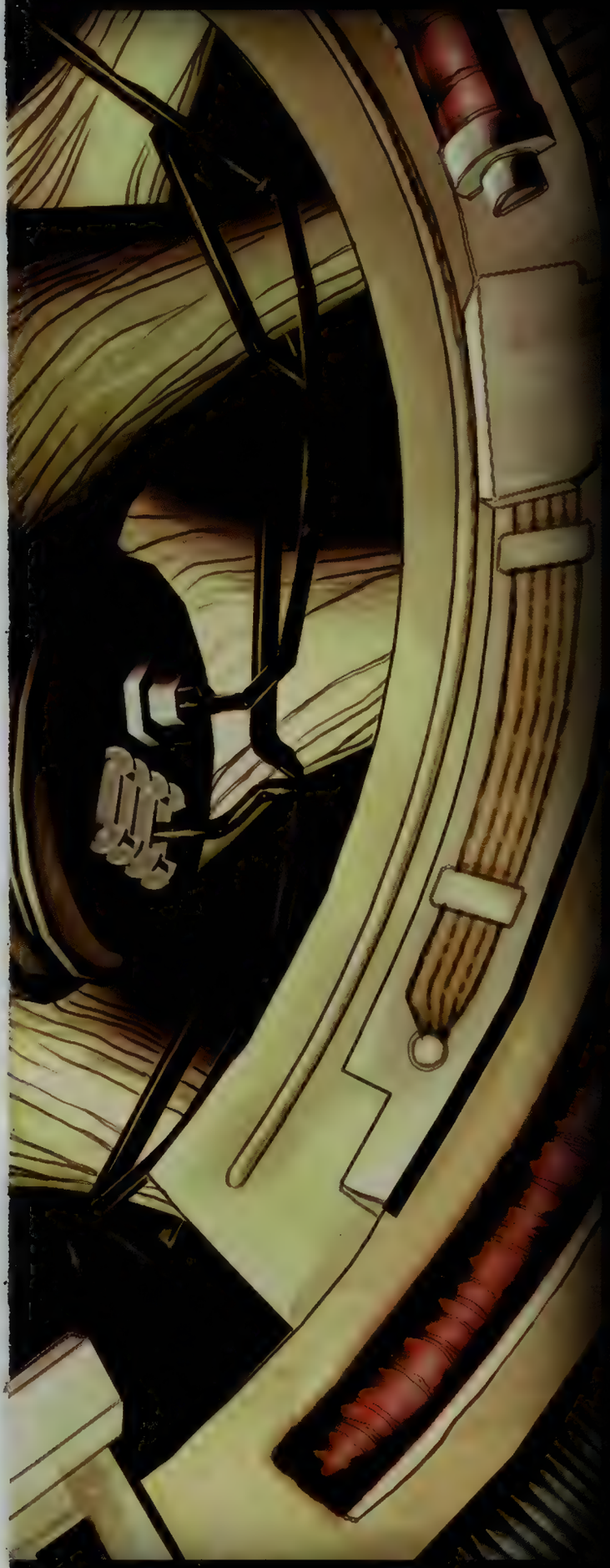
It's Crash's big debut for Game Boy Advance. In a world shrunk to the size of a wumpa fruit, this Bandicoot is in for a huge adventure. Literally.

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CRASH BANDICOOT The HUGE Adventure

"Handheld Crash is just as awesome as his console adventures." – IGN.com





play games

018 **gunvalkyrie**
024 **jet set radio future**
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054 **maximo**
060 **ice age**

review legend

perfect
stellar
great
good
average
poor

NOT JUST ANOTHER BUG HUNT

Sega christens the Xbox with an unforgettable sci-fi epic



story by dave halverson



I think it was Private Hudson (or was it Hicks?) who posed the question, "Is this going to be a stand-up fight sir, or another bug hunt?" Perhaps he's been to Tir Na Nog, the space colony where Smilebit's spectacular alien adventure *Gunvalkyrie* gets underway. Only you won't have Hicks or Vasquez to cover your butt, just an Xbox controller and, if you're lucky, mad skills.

Aside from its regal pedigree—coming from Sega via Smilebit—I knew little about *Gunvalkyrie* up until my DVD tray slid shut. Aside from what I'd seen at E3 and in recent screens—which amounted to stunning character designs amidst what looked like an extremely engaging search-and-destroy framework—*GV* was still that title lurking in the shadows behind *Jet Set Radio Future*, Sega's gorilla that ate the 800 lb. gorilla. Coming from Smilebit, that was more than enough to light my fire, but after playing the game, I'm now hovering somewhere between awe and giving thanks. Wisely offered as an Xbox exclusive (Sega—smart) this is one of those rare games that is so great, on so many levels, that you get butterflies in your stomach just thinking about it. Bring your best, though—*Gunvalkyrie* is tailor-made for nimble hands. If you're from the Treasure/Andromeda/Naka school of gaming, well, you may want to wear a diaper the first time you fire this one up.

Four years have passed since Dr. Hebble disappeared, and the populous still seems lost without him. The most celebrated scientist in human history, in 1870 AD he harnessed the power of energy cells deposited on Earth by Haley's Comet and gave birth to a new era. The secrets of DNA, the power of the atom, and even space exploration would follow. Tremendous technological advances were achieved within a few decades and a new indestructible empire was born. The world entered a second renaissance and one man controlled it all until, mysteriously, he left it all behind, and just disappeared. ("You should already have a topographical map of Ter Na Nog as well as Dr. Hebble's personal files uploaded into your headset. Remember, capturing Dr. Hebble is our secondary objective, do not lose site of our mission. There's no telling what he has in store for us. We all know what he did to the colonists.")

The staff at *Gunvalkyrie* HQ (founded by Dr. Hebble),





in cooperation with the British Empire Space Intelligence Agency (BESIA), are researching the current whereabouts of the good doctor and you, as his daughter Kelly, are going in. As the story unfolds, a disturbing pattern begins to emerge. Either Hebble has become completely unglued, unable to harness the knowledge he sought that compelled him to leave Earth, or he is undergoing a metamorphosis of profound proportions. My money's on the latter. As he sinks deeper and deeper into his psychosis, following his trail becomes increasingly perilous. *Gunvalkyrie* implants you into this fantastic, breathtaking alien world, as chaotic as it is eerily beautiful.

To deal with the ensuing mayhem, the nimble Kelly and powerful Saburouta dawn Gear Skins—assault suits with three available guns, which you can augment at the outset of each mission, depending on how much credit you've earned based on your past performance. You can also upgrade your fuel cells, which dispense special powers, and your shield generator, the suit's defense mechanism. The system redefines boost and hover gameplay. The controls take some time to assimilate, but as you become accustomed to all of their nuances, the game comes to life in equal measure, until the intensity boils over, creating a symbiotic connection.

The modern control pad is a wonderful thing, and Smilebit has changed my opinion on the one tethered to my Xbox (although I still crave the smaller import unit). Here's how it works: The left trigger controls limited boost, which the left analog steers. Pushing in on the left analog and in any direction ignites boost which, if done properly, can keep you in midair almost indefinitely. During a boost, a simple flick of the stick puts you into a slow hover, which you can hold until you take a hit. So although boost is limited, hovering is not. All the while (you are being shot at), the right analog controls the camera, while pressing it in and in any direction triggers a quick flip in that direction. Whether you're running or flying, this gives you an incredible amount of freedom to deal with both ground and air attacks/targets, most of which are







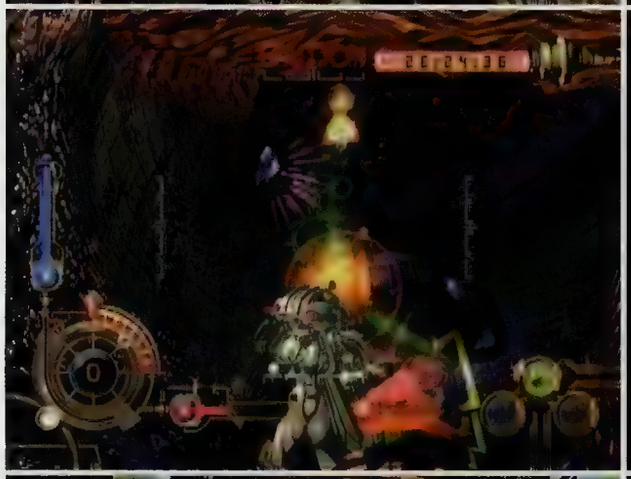
"LV 427 is for whimps. I eat Aliens for breakfast."
-Kelly

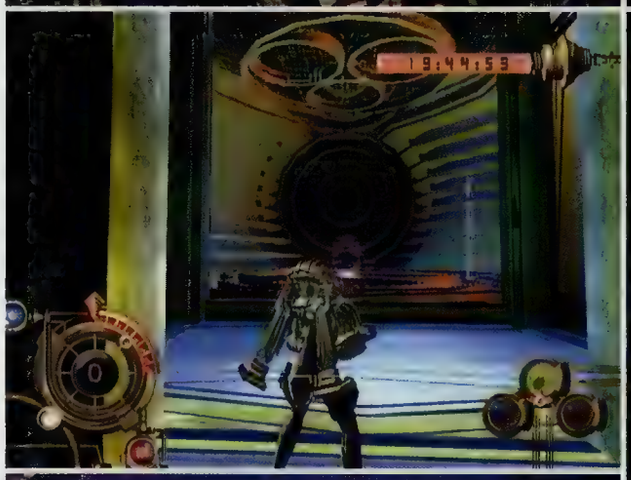
deadly fast. Meanwhile, the buttons are used to toggle between weapons, while the right trigger locks on and shoots. Fighting a ground-based boss, you might hover up, look down, fire a shot into its center, boost forward, and then flip 180 degrees and brace for its counter—all within seconds; it's as dynamic as it gets. Regarding the camera, all I can say is, "What camera?" It's intuitive to the extent that I didn't even notice it.

Putting all of this wonderful control and technology to good use, the missions range from (not so) simple retrieval to pure xenomorph elimination. Your trek begins amidst spore-covered alien canyons crawling with eerily intelligent arachnid swarms. The valleys seem alive, ablaze with an array of otherworldly colors and sites—true artistry on the part of Smilebit. The freedom of the canyons is fleeting, however, as you are soon hurled into the claustrophobic confines of Valhalla's massive underground labyrinths, infested with zero-tolerance alien hordes. Here you'll hover down massive vertical shafts, boosting, hovering and shooting, eliminating anything that moves, or simply clearing a path on a timed assault. As you land on a nearby catwalk, hydraulic doorways lead further inwards, revealing inner chambers where you'll face any number of nimble attackers. Smilebit obviously took great care developing their arachnid threat, injecting them with the same skin-crawling nature that dangerous bugs exude in real life—only bigger, faster, and way more deadly. As intense as the shooting and heavy elimination missions are, they make way to the calm of Naglfar's Pits—bathed in false serenity and playfully haunting music. Here you'll find a measure of platforming long forgotten, where even the most skilled player will exclaim, "Do they really want me to make... that?" Yes, they do. And after you've done it, they'll probably throw a big bug in your path.











"The modern control pad is a wonderful thing, and smilebit have changed my mind about the one tethered to my Xbox"

Beating some of these levels makes you feel genuinely empowered, knowing you just accomplished something normal people could never even dream of. But as hard as they seem, when all is said and done, you'll find yourself going back and breezing right through them—the mark of a truly great game. As expected (everything Smilebit has ever touched sounds positively angelic), the music is always right there beside you, setting the tone for each amazing scenario.

You can only stick with a game of this magnitude when it looks, feels, and sounds so good that you get butterflies in your stomach every time you see it. To achieve this, Smilebit has made Kelly and Saburouta two of the best character models in gaming today: They smash the vast majority of what's out there so badly that when you see them you'll wonder what 90 percent of the other Xbox developers are smoking. (You'll feel so sorry for Padawon, you'll look for Ewan's phone number.) Their animation looks completely natural as they lean ever so gently as they run left or right, and the Gear Skins have, under close examination, intricate moving parts. And looking around at where you are, the worlds are just as remarkable.

The Xbox is a monster of a console. I can't believe they let half the stuff out that shows so blatantly and carelessly otherwise. By opting to make *GV* an Xbox exclusive, Sega has allowed Smilebit to tap its resources, and the result is a game that beacons every enthusiast while inviting beginners and intermediate players to taste the fruit of some of Japan's finest creative minds.









A CHAT WITH THE DEVELOPER, SMILEBIT

Interviewee: Takayuki Kawagoe, VP of Development, SmileBit

***Gunvalkyrie* is an enthusiast gamers dream come true, incorporating a host of play mechanics that the player must finesse just right to achieve maximum immersion and success throughout the game. What inspired the booster-style gameplay?**

We didn't really set out to make a game for hardcore players, but we did consider the fact that many recent action games have been very straight-forward and a little too easy to master. With *Gunvalkyrie*, we wanted to return to an older style of gameplay where players can really notice their skill level rising as they master various elements of the game. We wanted to give hardcore players a feeling of accomplishment as they clear stages, but still make it fun and easy to pick up for more casual gamers.

Is this direction a result of the Xbox attracting a more enthusiast user in America?

Since next-generation consoles like the Xbox are relatively expensive and early adopters tend to be pretty hardcore, you have to target a somewhat hardcore audience, but the bottom line for us was to create a game that is fun for a wide range of gamers.

What has this team, in particular, worked on prior to *Gunvalkyrie*?

Hundred Swords and *Sega Rally 2* for Dreamcast and PC.

The bugs in *Gunvalkyrie* are an unrelenting menace and each have distinct characteristics. It's obvious a lot of thought went into their design. Can you tell us a little about this concept and how it came to pass?

Modeling the enemies in *Gunvalkyrie* after insects gave the team tremendous creative freedom. First, we liked the ominous feeling that the creatures create when they move in a swarm, it really helped us create intense, memorable battle sequences. The insect motif also let us design some truly original enemies with really cool, detailed death animations.

The team got most of their information and inspiration for the insects from the Internet and from repeated trips to the pet store. We actually bought a lot of insects to study in the course of making the game. One of the Gold Bugs we bought more than a year ago is actually still alive!

We also spent time observing machines and sea animals, infusing the rawness of their motion into the insect's behavior. We wanted to create enemies that were creative and original, yet realistic and believable.

And most importantly, are there plans for a sequel if *GV* takes off? Is this the beginning of a new Sega franchise?

If possible, we want to develop a sequel with the introduction of a network.

"With *Gunvalkyrie*, we wanted to return to an older style of gameplay where players can really notice their skill level rising as they master various elements of the game."

XBOX

GUNVALKYRIE

play rating

developer: smilebit publisher: sega available: march

Games like this only come from Japan, and they don't come around very often. So if you haven't already, get yourself an Xbox and indulge.



SO, YOU WANNA PIECE OF GUM, HUH?

Jet Set gets a new *Future*. And the beat goes on.

story by dave halverson

Are you ready to finally meet your Xbox? To get to know it intimately? To have and to hold—to cherish—for as long as Sega makes games like *Jet Set Radio Future*? Then I now pronounce you user and console. You may press start.

Just watching the intro, it becomes crystal clear: *Jet Set Future* is probably the coolest thing (without breasts) on the planet. If you have the love of a good woman and this game, well, call your mom and just say, "Thank you." And Hollywood is making a *Crazy Taxi* movie? Are they smoking paint? This is your movie, toy, and clothing franchise right here. I take it you've picked up on the fact that I like *Jet Set Future*, Sega's follow-up to the Dreamcast sensation that should have been but never was—and I believe is about to be.

If you played the original *Jet Grind Radio*, you probably tried rubbing your Dreamcast and asking it to grant you two wishes: to ditch the time limits and chill-out the ca-razy cops. How frustrating was it having to rush through all of those gorgeous missions, especially with the Rokkaku PD breathing down your neck? In *Jet Set Future*, time limits are a thing of the past and instead of dogging you as you try and go about your business, you can now knock down and tag the cops—even the nutty captain—at set intervals during the game, separate from the main objective. You can tag their tanks and spotlights, too. But Smilebit didn't stop there. They've polished the gameplay to the extent that the concept seems ten times more brilliant than it already was, and visually, it's just pant-wettingly spectacular, not to mention totally fluid, and completely intoxicating. You can now grind up poles to reach those hard-to-negotiate power lines, and the finicky wall grinds have been set to automatic. There are all sorts of new moves in your future, too. Hand plants and big-air—both preceded by crazy motion blurs—and a new turbo blast produce effects that have to be seen to be believed.

For those of you just tuning in, *Jet Set* is a free-form





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rocket skating slice of life that celebrates hip-hop, trance, dance, freedom and shit-hot gaming. Essentially, it's God's gift to videogames in the 21st century, set among the buzzing streets, alleys, sewers, urban centers, and outskirts of neo-Tokyo. But instead of gang warfare, you wage paint warfare, in a struggle against rival gangs, the Rokkaku PD and, of course, sinister, corporate megalomaniacs, like Enron, only dressed better. Tuned into the rhythm of the city, Tokyo's funkiest underground radio station, Jet Set Radio has your back, and helping you clean up the streets are all kinds of new friends you make along the way. Within each massive layered concrete jungle, tagging, completing challenges, and taking down anyone who gets in your way is the name of the game—all with a can of Krylon.

Jet Set Future is like life in a box. There are literally hundreds of people on the streets going about their business, shopping, talking, site-seeing, dancing, waiting for a bus, or just hanging out, and thick traffic clogs the streets. There are flocks of birds that part as you invade their space, newsstands, phone booths, signs, benches, traffic lights, bus stops, fountains—you name it: some of the pedestrians are even dressed cool. The sheer scope of each area is mind boggling.

Driving the visuals, Smilebit has taken cel-shading techniques to the next level, adding reflective properties to helmets, chains, windows, water and too many other surfaces to mention. In concert with an array of contrasting particle effects and real-time lighting, the end result is truly a marvel to behold. There are so many animated textures and effects going on sometimes that you just have to stop and say, "Holy funk." While you're gaping, may as well have a gander at the character models, too. They are extraordinary in design, animation and construction. Simplicity

"This is your movie, toy and clothing franchise right here"



















perfected. Gum has round boobs, panties detailed blinking eyes, and looks as smooth as a baby's butt.

The Garage where the GGs hang out has moved, too (don't worry, they brought the dog and the pinball machine). Here, new recruit Roboy, the downest robot in the hood, provides one-stop shopping for all of your game-management needs. You now get a whole chunk of the city to house your homies and manage the game.

The Dreamcast original was a 10 all the way (well, in our case, a 5), but falling victim to a steep learning curve and bad timing, it never found the wide audience it so deserved. Now on Xbox, this all-new sequel, which goes where no console game has gone before, should take the Xbox world by storm. Both of Sega's games, both of which come from Smilebit, make 98 percent of everything else available for the system look, quite frankly, like crap. *Jet Set Radio Future* is a gift. Unwrap it and have Christmas everyday.

"Hey Mr. DJ... hand me a controller"

XBOX

JET SET RADIO FUTURE

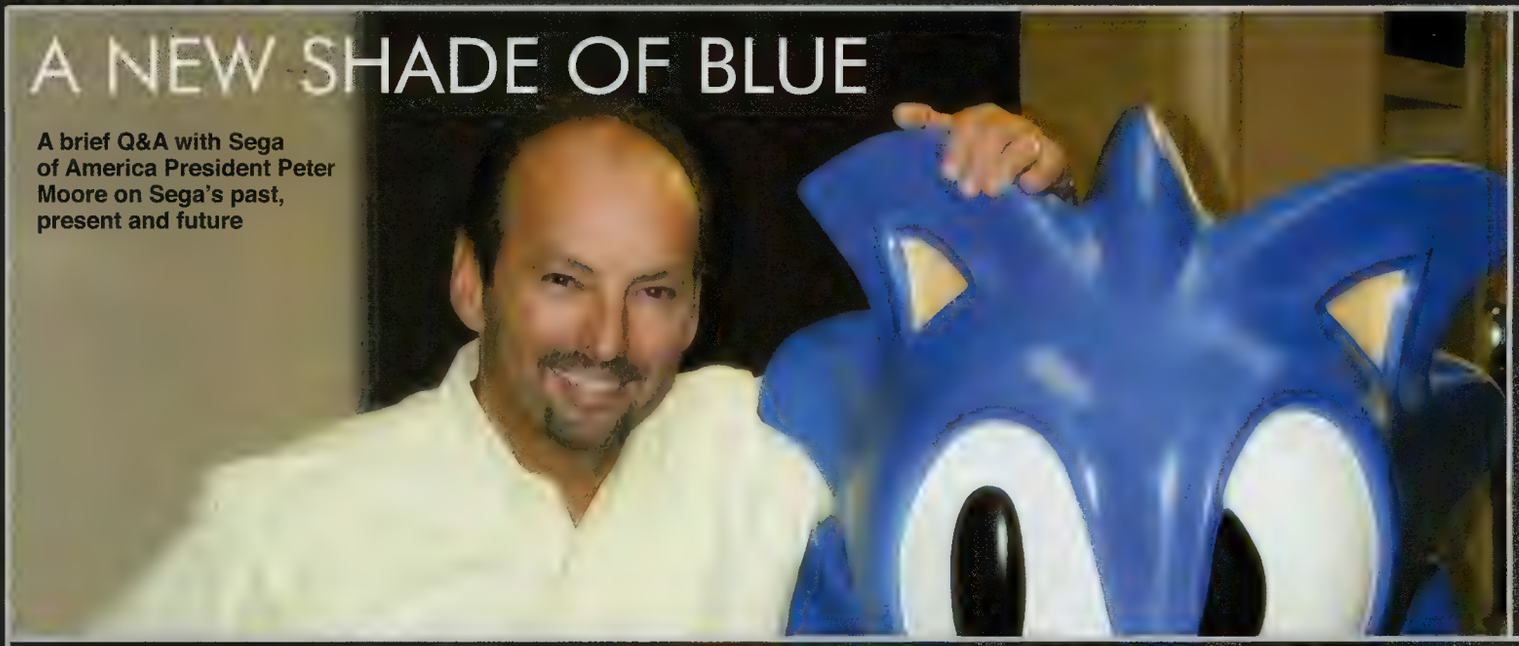
developer: smilebit publisher: sega available: now

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

I'm wondering if it's healthy to like a videogame as much as I do *Jet Set Future*. Smilebit's marriage of art, music, and gameplay is so profound, I may never stop playing it.

A NEW SHADE OF BLUE

A brief Q&A with Sega of America President Peter Moore on Sega's past, present and future



"Our focus is on our strength—content."

At this stage in Sega's new role as a software giant, are you happy with the way things are panning out?

Absolutely. 2001 was a monumental year for Sega. In just one year, we transitioned from a hardware manufacturer into a platform agnostic third-party publisher successfully and profitably. Unlike many companies in the U.S., Sega's fiscal year '02 was a successful year financially. All of this is good news, and this is only the beginning for Sega in the U.S. and Sega on a global level as a content company.

Sega's two offerings for Xbox, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Gunvalkyrie*, are among the console's best thus far and will undoubtedly be met with high praise and great sales. Have you considered doing these or any Sega titles exclusively with Microsoft, or will these games likely appear across all three platforms? Will the same apply regarding all of Sega's games?

At this point *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Gunvalkyrie* are premiering only on Xbox. The innovative cel-shading graphics in *Jet Set Radio Future* and the beautifully rendered scenes of *Gunvalkyrie* make these games a perfect fit for the system. Don't forget that Sega has also entered into an exclusive agreement with Microsoft to bring *Shenmue II* to the Xbox; this is significant for Sega and for gamers. Choosing the right platform for a game is critical and is done on a case-by-case basis taking into account many factors. I can't tell you about other exclusive games yet, but I can tell you that we have some very highly anticipated content coming to Xbox, as well as PlayStation 2 and Gamecube this year.

What is your assessment of the market now that the 4th quarter is behind us?

This video game market has never been stronger. We've just seen the successful launches of Gamecube and Xbox in the U.S., continued impressive sell-through numbers for PlayStation 2 and strong software sales throughout the holidays. Although the holiday season may be over, we expect the market to remain strong through the remainder of the 4th quarter and beyond.

Are you surprised at the number of Dreamcasts that has sold at the new price point? Are there any talks of additional software support? (Hey, we can dream)

Not at all. At the end of November, we shipped the last 200,000 Dreamcast units into retail. We knew that they would go quickly, especially at the new price point. By the end of the holidays we had sold through all remaining hardware units, giving Dreamcast a final U.S. install base of 4.2 million. Sega Sports *NHL 2K2* will be the last game we release for Dreamcast in the U.S., however, gamers can still enjoy the Dreamcast library of over 200 great games, many of which can be played online.

Looking at the Xbox and GameCube launches in comparison, the Dreamcast launch seemed better in every way; there was amazing software from the get-go and the buzz was deafening. Are you sure this was the right move?

Yes. Sega's strength has always been our games. No one can deny that we have some of the best development talent in the world with the likes of Yu Suzuki, Yuji Naka and Greg Thomas, just to name a few. We are a company that prides itself on many of the industry's firsts including the first real-time simulation games with *HangOn*, *OutRun* and *Space Harrier*, the first voice-recognition game with *Seaman* and the first online multi-player console games with *NFL 2K1* and *NBA 2K1*. Content is at our core and now that our games are available on all platforms, more games can enjoy the Sega experience.

Looking at all that has happened in the past five years, how do you see Sega five years from now?

Five years from today, the interactive entertainment industry will look much different than it does today. Home consoles will do more than you can imagine, games will look and feel like reality, online gaming will be seamless, wireless gaming will be the norm. In five years Sega will still be innovating, creating the industry's firsts and surprising gamers. Sega will be the leading global publisher of interactive entertainment.

There's been a lot of speculation as to what classic Sega games might be up for a next-gen overhaul (*Panzer Dragoon*, *Nights*, etc.). Beyond that, do you ever see Sega cracking the vault and porting games like *Golden Axe*, *Shinobi*, *Phantasy Star*, *Vermiliion* (I could go on for days) over to Game Boy Advance?

Sega has an incredible library of content with games like *Shinobi*, *Panzer Dragoon*, *Nights*, *Altered Beast*, *Phantasy Star*, *Golden Axe*—this list goes on and on. I can't tell you about our plans to bring back our legendary franchises, but I can tell you that you will see one or more of these games in 2002.

Which company of the Big Three excites you the most?

All of them. Microsoft excites us because they are the clear leader in pioneering their online network. Sega has an incredible amount of online expertise from Dreamcast and we are ready to work with our partners and make online gaming a reality for the second time as soon as our partners are ready. Nintendo excites us because they continue to put out quality content that not only drives hardware sales, but helps drive the entire industry forward, which is good for gamers. We are excited about Sony because of the remarkable successes they have achieved with the PlayStation and the PlayStation 2.

As much as we love playing great Sega games on all of these great new systems, we still miss our Sega boxes more than we could ever say. Is there any chance that Sega will ever, in any capacity, produce a console or portable game machine in the future?

Our focus is on our strength—content. We are currently solely focused on content development for all console platforms and on becoming the leading global publisher of interactive entertainment.

For what it's worth, we feel like you've really helped put the magic back in the Sega name. Do you see yourself sticking with Sega for the long haul? Is it Sega forever?

Thank you. Sega lives to create innovative, creative, remarkable content. Sega is not a job, it is a special part of my life, and I anticipate staying with the company for years to come.



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SKY GUNNING

Atlus has picked up a winner with *Sky Gunner*, a delightful 3D shooter



It's nice to see that Atlus has picked up *Sky Gunner*, an overlooked 3D shooter Sony released in Japan last year. A favorite of mine since I first saw the game at a Tokyo Game Show two years ago, *Sky Gunner*, while not having the most exhilarating action of the best 3D shooters, is a marvelously put together package with an enormously appealing visual style.

The story of *Sky Gunner* follows the exploits of two-player selectable characters, Cief and Copain, protectors of the so-called Eternal Engine, a perpetual energy machine. Naturally, such a prized commodity has brought out this world's evil genius, Ventre, and he'll stop at nothing to attain this awesome power.

As a *Sky Gunner*, you take to the skies, doing typical game stuff like blowing things up, and here's where the game gets interesting. Using a rather novel camera system that always points at your targets, you fly your craft around the enemies' axis—meaning you are often looking at the front or side of your plane. This takes some getting used to, but it proves to be rather effective. Once the shooting commences, you are treated to a satisfying chain system, where groups of targets can be exploded in a series, as well as some entertaining powered-up weapons like a fireworks bomb.

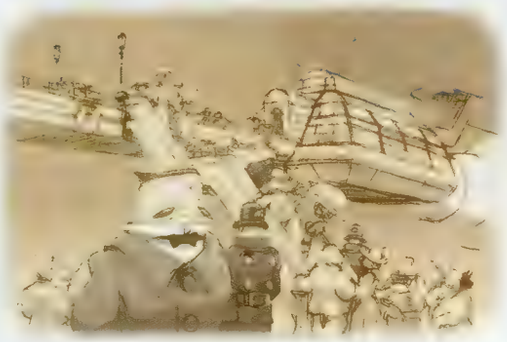
Sky Gunner's gameplay is solid, but it's in the game's presentation that real artistry can be seen. Apart from some rather hellacious slow-down, *Sky Gunner* is a gorgeous game, drawn in the sort of color-coordinated paradise that only the Japanese seem capable of. And everything just looks so neat, from the character designs to the various craft and environments that make up the world of Rive. There's this sort of turn-of-the-century look to everything, an almost classic aesthetic, and it's melded perfectly with the very Japanese art style, reminding me a little of Bandai's *Tail Concerto* for PSone.

Sky Gunner needs a little more of a visceral punch to be accepted by casual gamers, but Japanese shooter fans would do well to look forward to this game.

PETER GARDEN







"*Sky Gunner* is a gorgeous game, drawn in the sort of color coordinated paradise that only the Japanese seem capable of"









PS2

SKY GUNNER

preview

developer: pixel arts publisher: atlus available: summer

While it's no *Panzer Dragoon*, Atlus' *Sky Gunner* is a very entertaining 3D shooter with a wonderful sense of style. If only they can fix the slow down.

BITE ME

Eidos' first Fresh Game should come with a can of Raid



Eidos' new Fresh Games imprint, focused solely on bringing out curious and entertaining Japanese software, is ready to introduce one of its first offerings, *Mr. Mosquito*.

A surprisingly successful game in Japan (where it was called *Ka*, Japanese for mosquito), this truly unique title focuses on the exploits of a band of mosquitoes as they try to sink their little suckers into every member of the Yamada household and extract their blood. Can't say I've ever done that before in a videogame.

So that's the idea, but how does it work? Basically, you fly around each individual room, which finds each member of the Yamada family going about their normal, *very* Japanese lives, watching TV, taking a nap, etc. As a mosquito, you've got to approach them undetected and land on certain hot spots. Once planted, you plunge your sucker into their flesh and twirl the stick to suck the blood. But don't linger, or the victim will feel it and attempt to swat you away, leading to instant death. And if a member of the family happens to see you, they will chase you down and the only way to stop them is to strike these "relax points" on their body, causing them to, what else, relax, and return to their normal states. Weird, and quite fun.

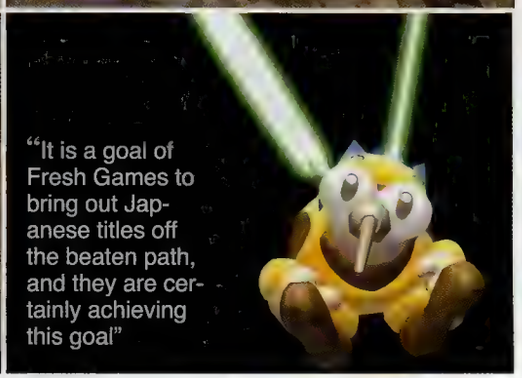
It is a goal of Fresh Games to bring out Japanese titles off the beaten path, and they are certainly achieving this goal.

TIMOTHY PIKE









"It is a goal of Fresh Games to bring out Japanese titles off the beaten path, and they are certainly achieving this goal"

PS2

MR. MOSQUITO — preview

developer: scei publisher: fresh games available: q1

Mr. Mosquito takes a novel concept and makes it work through a combination of humor and interesting play mechanics.

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SAY CHEESE!

Photography and the paranormal shake hands in this innovative ghost story





In all honestly, *Fatal Frame* may be the most effective horror experience to date—at least on a console. But you have to fully embrace the premise first, in which you use your mother's vintage camera to flash ghosts back to the nether world (a concept that seems overly goofy at the get-go, but quickly becomes a eerie tool of gameplay). And even though this is Tecmo's inaugural outing in the ambient horror genre, they've definitely been watching the competition very carefully.

Considering the *Resident Evil* franchise has concentrated more on action as of late and *Silent Hill* is just too murky and dark for some, *Fatal Frame* strikes the perfect balance. As you play as Miku, an attractive young lady in search of her brother—a journalist who vanished during an investigation of the Himura Mansion—you'll immediately become enthralled in a haunted world. Ambience is a key to this game—or at least to enjoying it in full effect—so even the slightest living-room distraction could deplete the overall atmosphere. If you play in the shadows, in the company of candlelight and without interruption (Tecmo locked us in hotel rooms with those instructions; it's recommended you follow them), *Fatal Frame* will gradually induce a paranoid twitch all over your body. A few hours into play, you'll be sensitive to small gusts of wind. By closure, sunlight might even be your enemy.



Enter the unique ghost battle system. Herein, you'll use your mother's antique camera to aim at approaching spirits (insert lame *Pokémon Snap* reference here). They'll duck and dodge as if they were a newborn puppy wired on caffeine, but there is little room for error. If you miss the target area too many times (which is easy to do, since each ghost has different habits), they will lunge forcefully at you, clinging to your soul.

Everything about *Fatal Frame* is quite inventive and, personally, I'm quite glad that someone turned on the lights (*Silent Hill* was too pitch black). This game will scare the shit out of you.

JON M GIBSON



"*Fatal Frame* will gradually induce a paranoid twitch all over your body"

FATAL FRAME preview

developer: tecmo publisher: tecmo available: march

The photography aspect of *Fatal Frame* may seem bogus at first, but give the battle system a full-pledged chance—it will impress.

BATON FRIENDLY

Take command of an orchestra in *Mad Maestro*, a Fresh twist on the music/timing genre

No one can accuse Eidos' Fresh Games from beating around the bush when it comes to acquiring quirky Japanese titles. In addition to *Mr. Mosquito* (see page 32), they've also picked up *Bravo Music*, an orchestra-conducting game, and are releasing it here as *Mad Maestro*.

A music-conducting game? You read that right, but don't let such an obscure concept scare you. In reality, *Mad Maestro* has more in common with "typical" music games like *Parappa*, in that the core of the game's play involves timed button presses. The difference here is that the button presses produce not snippets of rap, but music from an orchestra. Time the presses properly, and a lovely symphony ensues; screw up, and it sounds a mess. Sounds fairly simple, but *Mad Maestro* adds another level of complexion in that the button presses are analog sensitive—the harder you press, the louder the orchestra gets. There are three levels of loudness, and you must hit each one just right to get the proper sound from the ensemble. This makes the game a little more difficult than *Parappa*, but it's a very novel idea. How many games truly make use of the analog buttons in any meaningful way? Not many.

Like *Mr. Mosquito*, *Mad Maestro* is not likely to set the world on fire, but it is very encouraging that it exists at all in this country. Remember, there can be no mainstream without the alternative.

TIMOTHY PIKE







PS2

MAD MAESTRO preview

developer: Soft... publisher: Eidos/Fresh Games available: Q1

Music conducting games aren't exactly a dime a dozen, which makes *Mad Maestro* the current king of the crop. This is a novel idea executed well.



VEXXING

With an edgy new character, Acclaim's latest franchise gets off to a promising start

This little guy's gothic smirk may be the first inkling of Acclaim's long-awaited resurgence. He is, by all intents and purposes, the beginning of an extensive franchise—one that spans unthinkable worlds and unfathomable depths. He's clad for battle, armed with razor-sharp claws and a pair of boots that would guide him through even the meanest Malibu mudslide.

"The big difference between *Vexx* and prior games in the genre is the level of action *now*," crows an anxious Thomas Coles, Lead Designer on *Vexx* at Acclaim Studios Austin. "Many of these games have an undercurrent of strategy and exploration that provide a terrific, long term experience, but do very little to provide the immediate satisfaction of an arcade style game. By focusing on the combat elements of the game, we expect *Vexx* to seamlessly blend adventure elements with frenetic arcade elements to provide a more satisfying experience on both levels."

Following those guidelines, within six massively intricate worlds, drenched in complete freedom, enemies are scattered throughout. A smooth and simplistic control set allows for an easy pick-up-and-play rate; but the thousands of grunts that plague the planet Astara don't back down easily. Your ultimate advantage is in the Astani Battlegauntlets, a pair of hefty gloves, and collectible "war talons" that give Vexx an astounding catalog of powers. Glide from mountainous heights, climb to otherwise unreachable hideouts (in a technique indicative to Tom Cruise's impossible leaps during the opening of *Mission: Impossible 2*), unleash fiery blasts, thrust through water with a "power swim" (a nifty ana-



log-controlled, underwater paddling system)—everything and more in these alternative, techno-sleek fashion accessories. It's clear, upon seeing the game's star in action, that his moves were derived from classics of action film and the anime community.

Yet, without a storyline to compliment the fast-paced action, Vexx' surges of violence would be gratuitous. Thus, the peril of Astara and its peaceful citizens originates the moment the Shadowwraith, Dark Yabu, and his minions emerge from the heavens to enslave the planet. Ultimately, though, it is a tale of revenge, set in the vendetta-driven chambers of Vexx' mind. The Dark Yabu murdered his grandfather, you see. Your quest is set.

Everything about Vexx' scripting may sound like a typical Hollywood revenge plot, merely staged amid a fantasy landscape, but there is nothing typical about the overlain elements of the game. The score, for instance, is a consuming blend of Dixieland jazz, electronica-inspired thumps, and other alternative riffs that are scattered throughout each level.

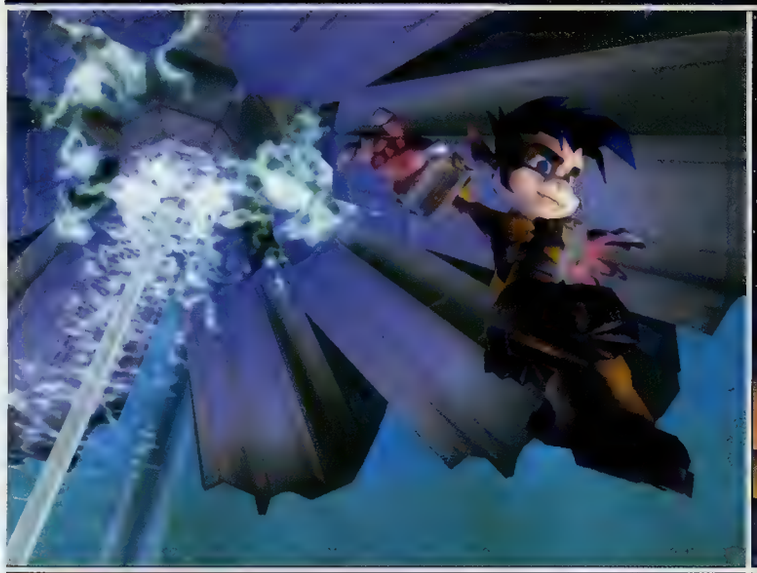
"Our composer is insane," Coles pauses. "Actually, he's quite brilliant (albeit mad—definitely mad). We wanted to continually surprise the player by supplying background orchestration that was both contemporary and unique in the genre. The jazz is, admittedly, somewhat particular to the gameplay in that particular level, while the orchestral techno is a little more consistent with what the player can expect throughout the rest of the game"

Acclaim Studios Austin's dedication to an overall smooth gameplay experience is quite evident, even though the game is still far from completion. Vexx dons over 200 animation moves, his character model is installed with some amazing inverse kinematic effects (dangling from cliff edges, blowing in the wind), and a real-time Mother Nature watches closely over Astara (rain, wind, etc.). Daytime and midnight hours also play a deceiving role in the game (when the sun goes down, enemy creatures morph into more aggressive beasts).

But the question of multi-platform performance does come to mind: "The game has been engineered from a design and art point of view to be as good as we could make it on all three of the consoles," Coles retorts, offering comfort. Which, if each console *is* used for its distinct advantages (time constraints being the only development issue), more players will be able to indulge in Vexx' universe. All three systems—Xbox especially—need more solid platformers. *Vexx* could be that remedy.

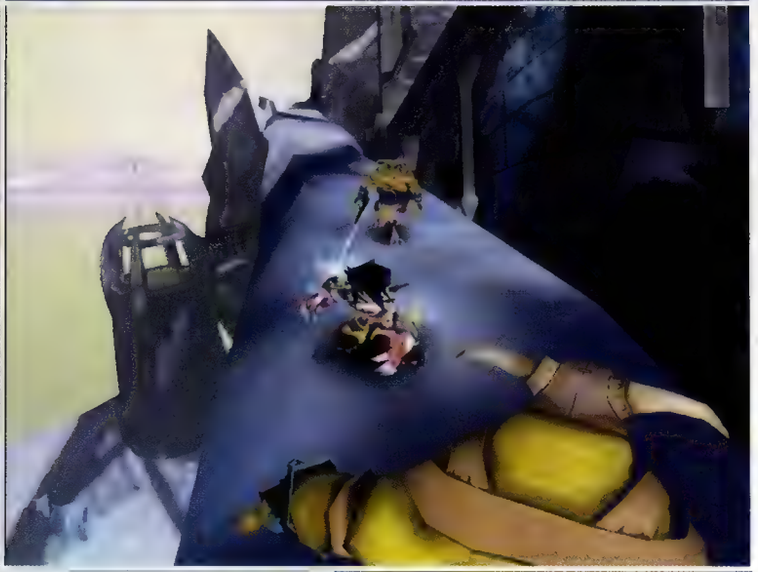
JON M GIBSON

"The big difference between *Vexx* and prior games in the genre is the level of action *now*"









XBOX PS2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE

VEXX

preview

developer: acclaim studios austin publisher: acclaim available: fall

It's evident that *Vexx* wants to expand what *Jak and Daxter* began on PS2. Though, it's too early to tell whether or not everything will fall into place.



JURASSIC DOMAIN

The Dinosaur Hunter returns on all three next-gen consoles for his much-anticipated origin story

Evolution: "a process of continuous change from a lower, simpler, or worse to a higher, more complex, or better state" (Merriam-Webster). Such is the complete embodiment of *Turok: Evolution.*

"In thinking about the series and the character, we felt it was important to tell the story from its beginning," chimes David Dienstbier, Creative Director at Acclaim Studios Austin. "One of the things we wanted to do was create an understanding of how this whole 'Turok' thing began. For long-time fans, it will be a welcome return to the heart of the series, and for new fans, it is the best possible way to begin. It just felt natural and was the perfect way to herald the return of the Dinosaur Hunter."

The setting is Texas, 1886. A one-on-one war wages between our faithful hero, Tal'Set, and his ruthless nemesis, Captain Tobias Bruckner. But before fatal blows are cast, a rift between their world and the Lost Lands splits and swallows them whole. As Tal'Set is nursed back to good health by natives in River Village, Bruckner is appointed as a new general by Lord Tyrannus. Bent on purifying the Lost Lands—a so-called "holy mission"—Tyrannus and his reptilian hordes slaughter anything in their path. The stage is set. The fate of the Lost Land is in your hands.

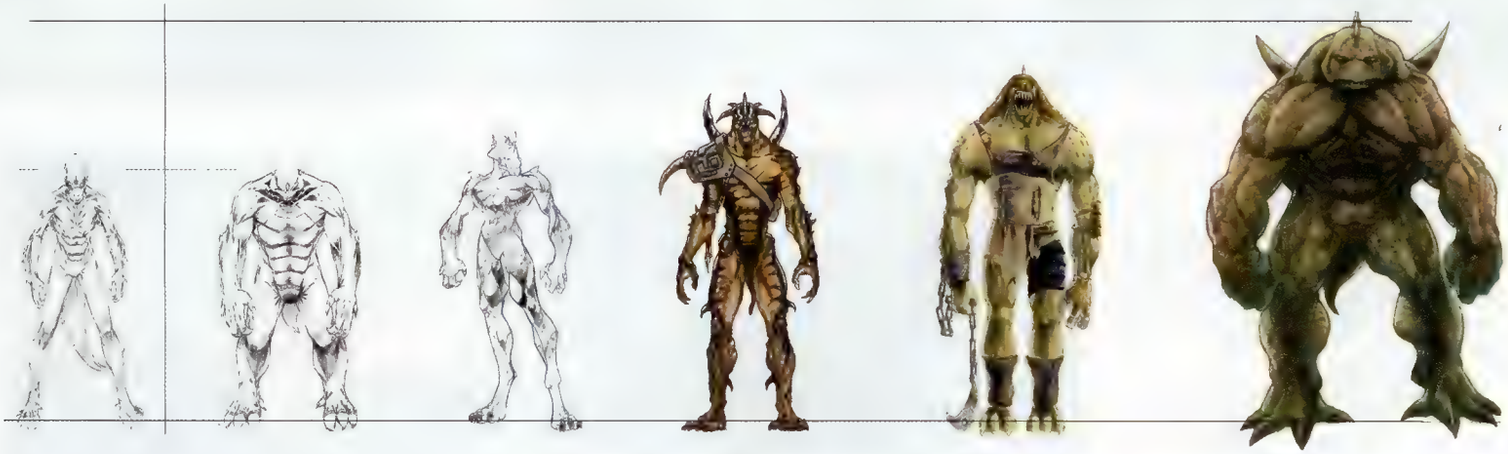
To up the ante, the development team has tossed in a little whammy called the Squad Dynamics System (SDS). While employed, you'll notice that reptilian foes are not as fearless as in previous games—their battle strategies have been enhanced to a much greater degree of AI. Shooting foolishly will only cause them to duck behind a rock until your ammo is depleted. Waiting patiently, however, allows you to take aim and conquer.

The environments are uniquely dynamic as well. When engaged in combat, as bullets soar and arrows fly, exhausting a few rounds on the trunk of the tree can be a useful defense. If aimed with precision, you can crush enemies when they're not even in range (just let the plant world be your ally).

"The graphic boost is obviously the most immediate indicator the player will have that this is the 'next generation' of *Turok*," Dienstbier continues. "It goes without saying that more powerful systems deliver more beautiful graphics. So players will see more realistic environments, more creatures and more indigenous life than we have ever created before—and it is all amazingly realistic. But in terms of gameplay, we *really* are trying to push all three systems to their maximum. In the first *Turok*, we could blow up







trees; but in *Evolution*, we can literally mow them down by the hundreds. The power of the systems allows us to create movement in literally every organic element of the environment if we wish. All of this ties into gameplay in fundamental ways, which was not possible to this extreme until now."

Even the Folly effects grafted into the game were a result of excruciating workmanship. Every sound sample, from the squawk of a parrot to the trickle of a creek, was recorded specifically for *Evolution* (absolutely no stock sound reels were applied; the lead sound engineer actually spent time in the Cayman Islands to capture the true ambience of a tropical jungle). To emphasize the exact measure of detail: even the noise of different shell casings hitting different surfaces can be heard.

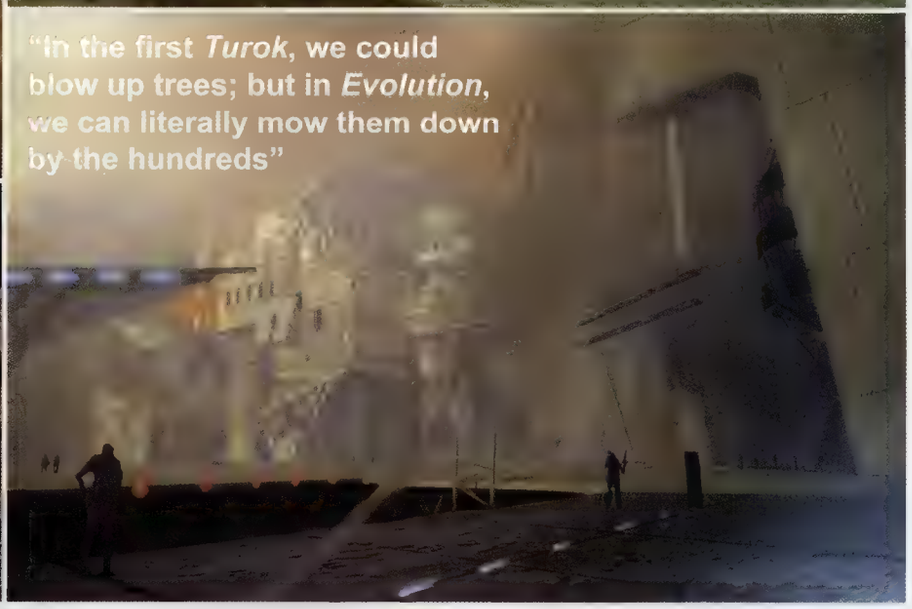
But what's a *Turok* romp without respective firepower. There definitely is a full-on arsenal of destructive force, but some weapons are still left unseen. Dienstbier chuckles: "[There are] more. How's that for a tease?"

JON M GIBSON









"In the first *Turok*, we could blow up trees; but in *Evolution*, we can literally mow them down by the hundreds"

XBOX PS2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE

TUROK: EVOLUTION

preview

developer: acclaim studios austin publisher: acclaim available: fall

The *Turok* franchise can finally achieve many of its original goals. Amazing visuals, impressive physics and impeccable audio are all in place.

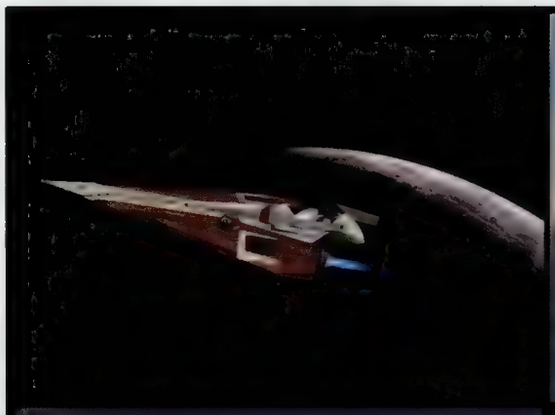
JEDI STARFIGHTER

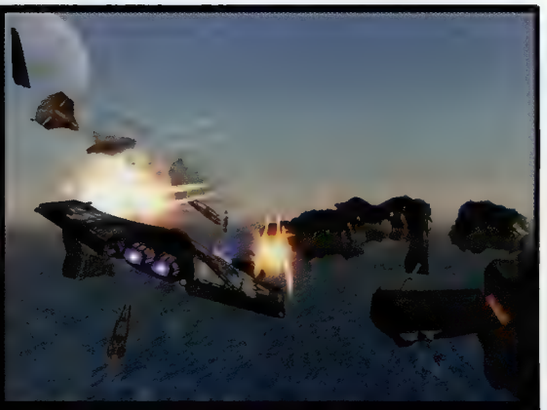
Let the *Episode II* juggernaut begin. Games are just now starting to surface that are designed to capitalize on the May release of *Attack of the Clones*, and while this game, *Jedi Starfighter*, and Rainbow Studios' *Racer* are not directly tied to the film, they will certainly share in the marketing glow.

Jedi Starfighter is, naturally, the sequel to *Starfighter*, a pretty good 3D shooter that has seen the light of day on both PlayStation 2 and Xbox. And, of course, some substantial tweaking to the formula has taken place to keep things fresh, the most significant of which is the inclusion of Force powers. Jedi pilots can use their command of the Force to slow down time, *Matrix*-style, and disable enemy craft, among other feats. The game will also sport a greatly enhanced 3D engine, allowing for more detail and higher levels of action; along with some new ships lifted straight out of *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*.

What remains to be seen is whether *Jedi Starfighter* can top Factor 5's awesome *Star Wars: Rogue Leader* on GameCube. The first Starfighter wasn't in the same league, so that's a pretty tall order to be sure. But in this galaxy, anything is possible.

TIMOTHY PIKE







"What remains to be seen is whether *Jedi Starfighter* can top Factor 5's awesome *Star Wars: Rogue Leader* on GameCube."

PS2

developer: lucasarts
publisher: lucasarts
available: summer

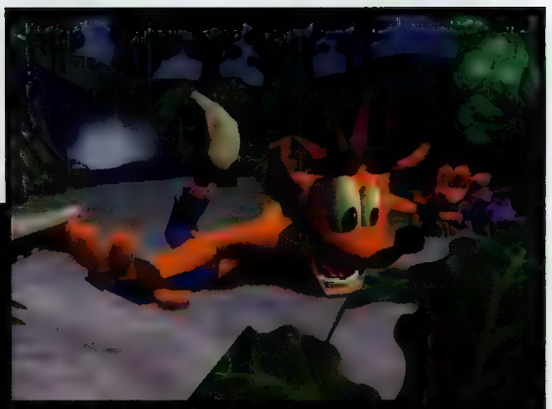
CRASH BANDICOOT: THE WRATH OF CORTEX

In today's port-happy climate, you can usually count on a game's technology stemming from the lowest common denominator, which almost never works in the Xbox's favor. A game designed specifically for the Xbox, such as *Shrek*, *Gunvalkyrie*, *Jet Set Radio Future* or *Halo*, would have to be dumbed down considerably to take up residence on the PS2 or GameCube. And since it's not cost effective to upgrade a game to meet the Xbox's specs, well, that's why there's so much dichotomy between Xbox games.

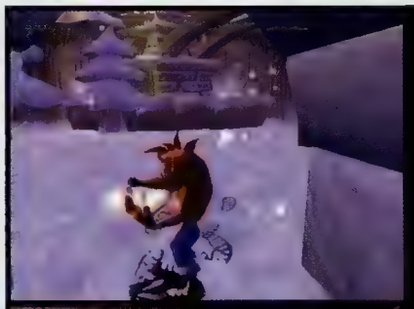
Thankfully, Universal Interactive is about to break rank and release *Crash: The Wrath of Cortex* with improved water and lighting effects, some tweaked levels, far less loading, and… fur shading! It's finally happened. Crash and Crush now have light, fluffy coats of fur. While it's somewhat noticeable from far away, up close they look like pint-sized beasts—like you could reach in (unless you've got a flat screen), pull them out, and let 'em run around the house spin-dashing the cat. I'd be dancing a jig if they bump-mapped the whole game, but hey, this is a step in the right direction. The underwater levels especially seem to benefit, although the whole game seems cleaner and brighter.

One of the few reviewers to embrace the old-school Crash format, I still find it captivating. Crash's staying power doesn't come from invention but, rather, how you play it. The game is designed to foster rhythmic platforming—the kind of developing pattern that allows you to thoroughly enjoy the basic premise of the genre, the judging of space between objects vs. weight and velocity; I always have and always will find that fun. Of course, Crash's animation is top notch, he's got a bevy of new tricks up his fur, and the game opens up considerably when mastered—all the ingredients you need to make a delicious platformer. Yum.

DAVE HALVERSON



"One of the few reviewers to embrace the old-school Crash format, I still find it captivating."





XBOX

developer: travellers tales
publisher: universal interactive
available: q1

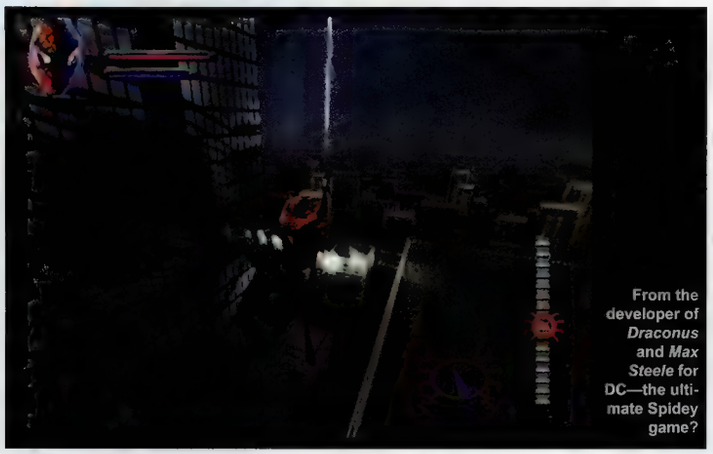
SPIDER MAN: THE MOVIE GAME

developer: treyarch
publisher: activision
available: may

While a newly buff Tobey Maguire gets to squeeze into spidey tighties and woo the ever-lovely Kirsten Dunst, you merely get to act out your Spider-Man fantasies with a controller and *Spider-Man: The Movie Game*. Your nemesis is the infamous Green Goblin, who has dispatched his evil disciples to make sure your adventures aren't so adventurous.

The game is set in New York, a city controlled, of course, by crime and mayhem—a perfect opportunity to deploy all the familiar Spider-Man hero moves. Swing and sling, jump and crawl: *Spider-Man: The Movie Game*.

BRADY FIECHTER



From the developer of *Draconus* and *Max Steele* for DC—the ultimate Spidey game?

DEUS EX

developer: ion storm
publisher: eidos
available: now

Count me out when it comes to PC gaming, but sign me up for console games transplanted from some of the PC world's finest crop—as long as I don't have to plod through the mire of the typically sloppy port. *Deus Ex*, considered by most to be one of the most innovative and flat-out entertaining FPS games when it debuted almost two years ago, is yet another original, top-tier effort stepping into the superior arena of modern console design, and its presence here brings big anticipation. A trek through *Deus Ex*'s dusky, plague-infected reality reveals a lot of what you expect from an FPS—shooting, running and explosions. Add to this *Deus Ex*'s most interesting ambitions—uncommonly complex character development, and an extremely detailed inventory and special abilities angle. How's that for a port?

BRADY FIECHTER



The thinking man's FPS game or just another PC port?

EVE OF EXTINCTION

developer: yukes
publisher: eidos
available: q1

In Yukes' (the talent behind the violent powerhouse *Sword of Berserk*) *Eve of Extinction*, you are a tough guy in a tough future world who uses fists, feet and glowing ass-kicking sticks to do all the damage a tough guy is called to do. The glowing sticks, or Legacy, can be equipped in and out for combo attacks, as well as used as a catapult to launch onto ledges, poles and basically anything that is otherwise unreachable by a normal jump.

EoE is large part beat-'em-up, but it furthers its ambitions with presentation and adventure platforming. Other touches, like an extensive story and cinematic breaks that require button presses in accordance with on-screen commands—think *Dynamite Cop*—work to lift *Eve of Extinction* from the potential mire of an old-school genre.

BRADY FIECHTER



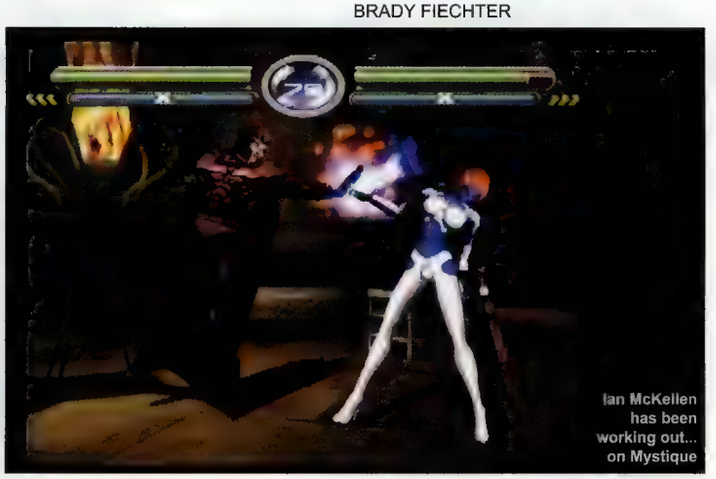
The creators of *Hermie Hopperhead* enter the street-fighting fray

X-MEN: NEXT DIMENSION

developer: paradox
publisher: activision
available: summer

"We are really trying to take advantage of the X-Men license to create super hero battles, using the characters' signature strengths and weaknesses, as opposed to creating a traditional martial-arts type fighter," says a recent press statement from Activision. So where do you begin to separate a fighting game from the heap? Best bet: remove the restrictions of an arena and throw the combatants—here we've got mutants and sentinels—into multi-tiered settings that contain destructible elements. Looks great on paper.

BRADY FIECHTER



Ian McKellen has been working out... on Mystique

THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH THIS ONE

Rainbow Studios tackles Pod Racing, bringing their substantial skills to the *Star Wars* Universe











I should be sick of *Star Wars: Episode 1* racing games by now, but I'm not. There's a simple reason for this: they've been good, but none so good as this latest, *Star Wars: Racer Revenge* from Rainbow Studios.

Sure, it lacks the larger-than-life quality of the awesome Sega arcade *Racer*, but *Revenge* on PS2 offers more than enough in return. Set some years after *Episode 1*, a revitalized Sebulba has set his sights on regaining the Pod racing crown, though now he faces some new competition in the form of some new alien pilots and a teenage Anakin Skywalker (whose model in the game bears a fantastic likeness of Hayden Christensen, who plays Anakin in *Episode 2*). Thus the stage is set for some very fast and very dangerous Pod Racing across many planets in a galaxy far, far away

Most immediately impressive, like all of Rainbow Studios efforts, are the graphics. Though fixed at 30 frames per second, Revenge's visuals are out of this world. The tracks are superbly designed, with incredible vistas and stunning changes in elevation. And the pods themselves are rife with detail, like moving flaps and animated pilots.

But it's in the play that *Revenge* truly succeeds. Simply put, the game feels awesome. The control is perfect, with this amazing sensation of skimming the surface of the courses at supersonic speeds. The pods' visual dynamic is spot on as they flow and snake through corners and boost through the straights. And the racing action is very exciting. Battles for the lead are intense as you bash pods, fighting for position, or better yet, the destruction of your opponent. Do enough banging and they'll be knocked out. But you've got to mind your own shields, lest the same should happen to you. The AI is such that these battles are common, but just enough to sufficiently raise the heat, not so much that you spend the entire race trading paint.

As you may have gathered, I am quite impressed with *Racer Revenge*. Were it not for some minor draw-in and the fact that it's a bit easy, I would call it the perfect *Star Wars* racer. How's this for praise: I actually forgot about *Wipeout Fusion* for a second. Just a second.

TIMOTHY PIKE

"How's this for praise: I actually forgot about *Wipeout Fusion* for a second."

STAR WARS RACER REVENGE

PS2

developer: rainbow studios publisher: lucasarts available: now

play rating

I had high hopes for *Star Wars: Racer Revenge*, as Rainbow Studios has a pretty great track record, and I wasn't disappointed. This is a really good racing game, Star Wars or no.







GETTING INTO IT

Koei brings their hyper-wacky guitar game to the States, and the world is a better place for it



When Koei's one-level demo of *Guitaroo Man* was released last year in Japan, my delight with the game was equaled only by my fear that it would never see the light of day in the States. Music games don't have quite the same following here as they do in Japan, so I bet this oddball from Koei would remain the domain of the import shops.

Thankfully, I was wrong, as *Guitaroo Man* is here in all its twisted glory. The concept of the game takes some 'splaining, though I'll try to do it as efficiently as possible. Think of *Guitaroo Man* as a sci-fi *Parappa* with a guitar. The play within each level is divvied up between three alternating sections—Charge, Attack, and Defend. During Charge and Attack modes, you manipulate the left analog stick in line with an undulating bar that slides across the center of the screen. By moving the stick and executing timed button presses, you unleash soaring guitar licks, which fill up your health in Defend mode and throw attacks in Attack mode. In Defend mode, triangle, square, circle, and X button prompts stream in from four sides of the screen, and you've got to press each at the correct time to block enemy attacks. In the later levels, Defend mode becomes manic as the buttons fly towards the center of the screen in dense packets.

What all this amounts to is one hell of a fun music game. The game system is very addictive, and the hilariously bizarre scenarios are wonderfully conceived and drawn, with each stage playing out like some futuristic rock opera from the fruity side of the Japanese aesthetic. Not to be missed.

PETER GARDEN

PS2

GUITAROO MAN

play rating

developer: koei publisher: koei available: now

Guitaroo Man is a terrific music/timing game. The control system is a blast, and the twisted scenarios will leave you gleefully bemused.

THANK YU

Yu Suzuki's brainchild survives in the post-*Dead or Alive 3* world thanks to its typically brilliant play


Aoi


Lei Fei


Vanessa


Lau

Big in Japan. Such is the way that many would preface a description of Sega AM2's *Virtua Fighter* series. For various reasons, *VF* never captured America's attention as did *Tekken* and, to a slightly lesser extent, *Dead or Alive* (ironically built originally around a *VF* engine). Part of *VF*'s "problem" was its attempt to keep the fighting as close to reality as a playable and fun game would allow. Another "problem" was the equally realistic character designs that were short on flash. There's no such thing as an OTT Virtua Fighter character (save for the ubiquitous, chrome Dural).

Things are much the same with *VF4*, and I can't say I'm complaining. I've always liked *VF* for the very reasons that some did not. It has a seriousness of purpose about it, and a slight dryness, which I find makes the action rather more impactful than other 3D fighters. But first and foremost, I've always found the games to be fun, with a satisfying flow to the fighting and tangible sense of impact.

In this latest sequel, two new fighters join the fray—the button-mashing friendly Lei Fei and the ripped Vanessa—along with a number of subtle and not-so-subtle tweaks. For the first time in the series, walls have been introduced in some of the stages, diminishing the instances of Ring Out losses that so many seemed to hate. Also new is a more complex throw reversal system and a sidestep that requires accurate timing to accomplish. These changes won't mean much to newcomers or to casual fans, and I'm not about to explore the minutia of their implication on the play (that remains to the province of board debates).

What's important is that it still feels like *VF*, and it is deep and rewarding. The instant gratification that any fighter requires is here in that the throwing and landing of attacks feels awesome. Canned combos dole out massive damage if executed correctly, and the throws are incredible to watch.

Where *VF4* will falter a bit in people's perception is in its graphics. Is it a bad-looking game? Gracious no. It's just that this game called *Dead or Alive 3* on Xbox has shoved the fighting game visual standard through the roof. By comparison, *VF4* looks a little like an early PS2 game, all shimmering and hard around the edges. The character models are great, and there are some terrific lighting routines, and some terrific-looking stages.

But visuals are but one aspect of this game's worth. It's the play that really matters, and *VF*, as always, plays marvelously.

PETER GARDEN









PS2

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4

play rating ●●●●●○

developer: sega am2 publisher: sega available: march

Dead or Alive 3 rules the graphical roost, but it's *VF* that has the legs when it comes to depth and realism of play. There's nothing else like it.

FANCY A SHAG?

A satisfying and swiftly playable first-person shooter extends its life on the PlayStation 2

No One Lives Forever contains small, discrete guns and big, intoxicatedly powerful guns. The action is relentless, fueled by swarms of heavily armed enemies who all are aiming directly at you. Things blow up a lot, and bodies drop dead all over the place. There are switches and buttons to activate, and it all goes down through the eyes of an irascible agent of death. In other words, *No One Lives Forever* is your standard FPS, and yes parents, you basically shoot things.

No One Lives Forever may do little new to elevate its genre, and it wears the weathered clothes of an assembly-line PC port, but there is just enough here to like to engage the FPS junkie like myself.

It may be a bit flat and aged, but the game's visual aesthetic casts a nice atmosphere and sense of location. Exotic settings always work extremely well in an FPS, and here we find ourselves happily inflicting pain in such places as Moraco and Germany. I enjoy the overall look and feel of the game just enough, and the levels are designed with the kind of skill that keeps us caught up in what is essentially perfunctory action. And I also like the droll dialogue and constant enemy banter, even if the story is irrelevant and distracting.

This is certainly no award winner, but *No One Lives Forever* gets the job done: I was entertained from the first level's deliberate sniping sequence to the last's balls-out chaos.

BRADY FIECHTER



"I was entertained from the first level's deliberate sniping sequence to the last's balls-out chaos."





PS2

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

play rating

developer: monolith/fox publisher: sierra available: now

This one was out a long time ago on PC, and the rudimentary port doesn't mask its age. But no matter: It's still a good time for the FPS fiend.

HOOP DREAMS

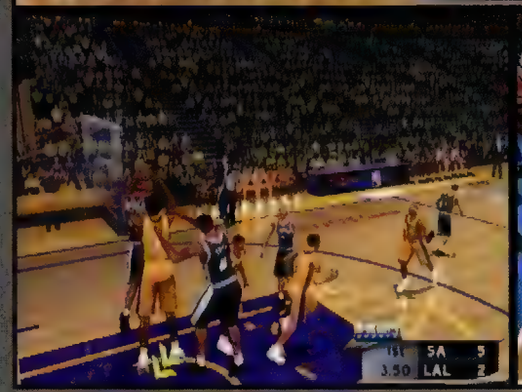
Visual Concepts hit the hardwood yet again and come away with a game of hoops that is truly second to none

I saw Shaq the other day, buying CDs at a local Tower Records. The man is a giant, barely capable of squeezing through normal doorways. Nature decided to smile when it made this one.

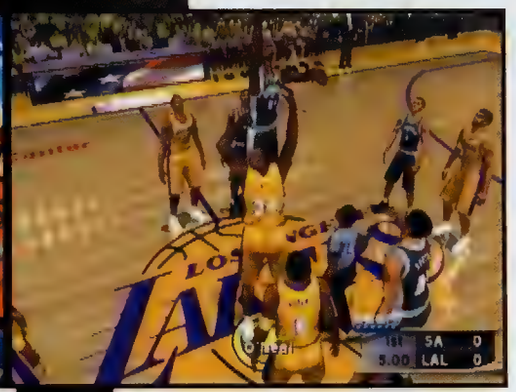
What makes *NBA 2K2* so spectacular – a nicely improved sequel in an already first-rate series of video game basketball – is its ability to exceptionally translate not just the look of the real deal, but the way it feels to move around the court, commanding the defense and offense and various levels of player abilities and skills. I don't know what it's like to be nearly seven feet tall and weigh more than a giant appliance, but I do have the sense of what a guy like Shak experiences out there on the court. And I know how a relatively pint-size Alverson controls his game, draining threes and orchestrating fast breaks. Everything about this game just works the way you want it, and expect it to.

Maybe next year Visual Concepts will add a flagrant-foul brawl option for even more realism, but until then, enjoy the best hoops simulation around. Credit their superior success to slick programming, kinetic presentation, and a fastidious attention to the details that you want but don't often get in a basketball game. Indeed, this is an unflinching simulation, focusing on realism and depth of play that consistently maintain challenging, engaging matchups. You'll be tracking stats and engrossed in season play for weeks; bring a friend to the couch and you're likely to play till you collapse. You may never see the superstars in person, but now, more than ever before, you're in their shoes.









XBOX

NBA2K2

play rating

developer: visual concepts publisher: sega available: now

If it says 2K2 just get it. Like their football game, Visual Concepts basketball game is impossible to put down. Tell a friend.



ON ANY GIVEN ...DAY

Visual Concepts bring their grid iron masterpiece to the Xbox with stunning results

NFL 2K2 is a necessity for football freaks, the healing bandaid when your team blows (go Colts) in real life, letting you pretend they're actually a playoff contender.

Reaching the Big Game is a rewarding, challenging, hugely entertaining task. No matter which team you choose; it doesn't get any better than *NFL 2K2*, our pick for best football game of 2001. Yes, better than Madden (at least different) it now sits atop the pile with greatly improved visuals that push the envelope of video game football even further than when it debuted on the Dreamcast.

The virtual sports practitioners at Visual Concepts have taken it all a few yards further. One look at the game signals pleasant recognition – the foundation hasn't changed dramatically, with player models and texturing receiving the familiar sequel treatment: but look over at the side lines or up in the stands and you begin to feel like your immersed in a football game so real you'll be picking grass out of your teeth.

Newbies will be thrilled with the accurate representation of real football while series veterans will appreciate a tighter passing game, more authentic running game, and a more in-tune computer opponent.

The best sports games, I believe, are the ones accesible enough to hook you, yet derive their lasting power from an inner complexity that sets them apart from overly-simplistic arcade titles that more often than not leave the religious sportsfan wanting more. A great sports game reveals its depth and sophistication well beyond the first play, actually improving along with the skill level of the player. *NFL 2K2* embodies all this and loads more, effectively balancing an arcade touch with the perfect sim lean. It's at once intuitive and deep, a bit exxagerated yet deceptively extensive in execution. For 2002, it's the only football game I need.









XBOX

NFL2K2

play rating

developer:visual concepts publisher: sega available: now

So far everything attached to the Xbox that says Sega on it borders on perfection. You'll be hard pressed to find a better football game than 2K2 in 2002.



DEMON LORD

One of the PlayStation 2's finest action games finds a home on Xbox

Ports present a bit of a quandary for a game reviewer. Does one focus on the quality of the port and its use of the hardware, or does one concentrate on the quality of the game itself? Readers with one system care only of the game's merit, while owners of multiple systems are interested in which version to spend money on, perhaps even with an eye to getting multiple versions if the differences are great between them.

The only solution is to talk about both, which I am about to do in regards to *Genma Onimusha*, Capcom's Xbox version of the PS2's *Onimusha*. I'll begin with the merits of the game itself, universal to both versions. First, *Onimusha* is an awesome game, a perfect action interpretation of *Resident Evil* set in feudal Japan. With its lush (though mostly static) pre-rendered backgrounds and simply sublime sword slashing gameplay, *Onimusha* looks and plays like a dream. And good ideas are sprinkled throughout the game, like a satisfying weapon upgrade and magic system, giving a purpose to the copious, bloody encounters. And forget the pesky item management of *Resident Evil*, as you gain pretty much everything you need from killing enemies. *Devil May Cry* takes some of these ideas even further, but *Onimusha* did it first.

If you've never played the PlayStation 2 version, then of course, I highly recommend *Genma Onimusha* on Xbox. Now for those of you who have played it (or own it), here's what to expect from *Genma*. First, the bad news: the game looks almost identical. We all know by now that the Xbox is a polygon munching monster, and nothing could be finer than seeing all that power being put into rendering characters only. Sadly, the character models here seem no better than they did on PS2. Admittedly, they are quite good, but not all they could be on Xbox. So the graphics have been pretty much left alone, but the same can't be said for the play. The greatest change here is the inclusion of green orbs emitted by some enemies as you attack them. Like other elements discharged during attack, like magic and health spheres, you can suck these into your arm, increasing your abilities. But green orbs can also be sucked in by enemies, sending them into Berserk mode, wherein they become more powerful. To stop this, you must tap the A button repeatedly in a tug-o-war with the enemy. While tapping, you're prone, of course, to enemy attack, and this adds yet another layer of excitement and tension to the already satisfying core action of the game. And gather five green orbs and you can induce a brief invincibility which also sees your health being replenished. This is a good change, as are the others, which include a slick new outfit, a new boss, a series of charge moves, and even a few areas which I don't remember seeing on PS2. In addition, the game is a little more difficult, as there can be more enemies on screen. And the game's sound, always good, is now stellar thanks to a 5.1 Dolby Digital mix. The lush, orchestrated soundtrack never sounded better.

Any way you slice it, *Genma Onimusha* is a great game. Owners of both systems would be advised to pick the Xbox version just for the subtle enhancements to the gameplay as it looks, for all intents and purposes, no different than the PS2 version. As to whether or not it's worth getting for current owners, only you can answer that. Are you an *Onimusha* freak, willing to play it just to see the new costume and boss? Then you've already got it, I reckon.

PETER GARDEN











"Owners of both systems would be advised to pick the Xbox version just for the subtle enhancements to the gameplay"

XBOX

GENMA ONIMUSHA

play rating

developer: capcom publisher: capcom available: now

Onimusha is still an awesome game, even if some of its thunder has been stolen by *Devil May Cry*. If only this version took full advantage of the Xbox hardware.

BLOOD WAKE

Considering I've been longing for a hellishly themed *Twisted Metal Black* on water, *Blood Wake* isn't exactly what I wanted, but it's a welcome sight in a sea of land-locked, mission-based driving games. Among a mystical neo-medieval backdrop, as Shao Kai, you play a pawn in a deadly struggle between the Shadow Clan, the rebel band that scooped you out of the sea, and The Iron Empire, ruled by the power-thirsty brother who set you up to die. It's a deep, compelling story that unfolds in a peculiar style, through hand-drawn line art on worn parchment, complete with boatloads of spoken dialogue. The missions, which run the gamut in terms of objectives, boil down to the usual recon, escort, and search and destroy variety, yet they are refreshingly well-devised. Rushing in without knowing your enemy and the coastline ahead will always result in you and your gunner's watery deaths. Ammunition and life force are both in short supply and can only be replenished by destroying other vessels. The give and take of those exchanges, which build and constantly evolve throughout the game, together with the ground-based assault from the coves and channels you're invading, present a broad range of engaging scenarios. You're constantly going from fast assaults, where maneuvering your craft is key, to slow, methodical sneak attacks using what precious long-range armament you've managed to preserve. As you assail in rank, gaining the confidence of your superiors, you graduate from simple speedboats to catamarans, gunboats, devil boats and finally hydroplanes—all rigged differently, depending on the mission ahead.

Not to say the game is without fault. Although I found it worth playing all the way through, at times I felt unfairly outgunned. Towards the end, attacks from the shore border on impassable as many of the boats either aren't equipped to return equal fire or are just too sluggish to get away fast enough. Things also tend to get a bit redundant, with the later levels feeling like larger or more populated versions of earlier missions. *Blood Wake* could also do with a little more punch; the pulse-pounding sound of large displacement in-boards is under-used, and the music is too light. But I believe the good outweighs the bad. The visuals are striking (although the shore would have benefited from better textures and bump-mapping), especially the sea, which looks, well, like the sea. *Blood Wake* is an overall unique, nicely devised Xbox exclusive, deserving of a devilish sequel. DAVE HALVERSON





"*Blood Wake* is an overall unique, nicely devised Xbox exclusive, deserving of a devilish sequel"

developer: stormfront studios
publisher: microsoft
available: now

play rating

WRECKLESS: THE YAKUZA MISSIONS

The Xbox could certainly benefit from a quality mission-based driving title, and it looked like the mother of all such games was pulling into the driveway. But as it turns out, the missions in *Wreckless* essentially boil down to selective ramming under tight time constraints. There is simply no time to enjoy, or attempt to intelligently play, one of the sweetest-looking games ever seen.

I get the whole mass-destruction thing, and *Wreckless* certainly takes it to new heights, but the way the game is put together leaves the player with a doubly frustrating predicament. You want so bad to like it, but no matter how you slice it, it's just not that fun once the *wow* factor (luckily it's a titanic *wow* factor) fades away, and you realize you're just ramming cars again.

Should you choose to hang around long enough to dial in each spectacular chunk of Hong Kong real estate, the gist (no matter what the mission op reads) is to ram Yakuza sedans and then make for the airport, the secret plans, the goal, or what have you. Every fifth mission they throw a boss-like confrontation your way, and that's a wrap. The missions range from fun to overly manic to completely frustrating, and always look utterly stunning. With each clocking in between 5 to 9 minutes, it's short-lived, but the replays are so jaw-droppingly amazing that you may find yourself drooling over your handy work for years to come.

Set in beautiful downtown Hong Kong, the action follows the exploits of two teams commissioned to thwart a Yakuza counterfeiting ring, among other things. The Flying Dragons—two hot, anime-inspired super-cops that look like they crawled straight out of *Burn Up W*—work for the local PD, while Ho and Chang fill the stereotypical dumb and dumber secret agent side of the equation. The between-mission cinemas for both are impressive and surprisingly well-acted. But it's ultimately the technology at work in *Wreckless* that steals the show. The real-time vehicle deformation, seamless car and driver models, and explosions so real you can smell the smoke, would be impressive in sparse environments, but these are teeming with pedestrians and heavy traffic. Even at night, they are bathed in reflective neon lights.

All of this adds up to somewhat of a paradox. If the game wasn't so incredible looking, I wouldn't give it the time of day—but it is, and so I have, and so you probably will, too. I'll say this: If wrecking driving happens to be your thing, then you, my friend, have arrived.
DAVE HALVERSON





"Real-time vehicle deformation, seamless car-and-driver models, and explosions so real you can smell the smoke"

developer: bunkasha
publisher: activision
available: now

play rating



SONIC BREACHES

Sonic has finally found himself on Nintendo hardware, but this is a less than ideal debut for the blue wonder

For many, *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* represents a monumental occasion: the appearance of Sonic on a Nintendo machine. Some thought it would never happen. Well, here it is.

My enthusiasm for this moment in time is a little tempered, however. In an ideal world, the first Sonic game to appear on a Nintendo machine would have been an original one, not a port. Also, I've always had some reservations about *Sonic Adventure 2*. Make no mistake: It's quite a good game, but not an improvement in my eyes over the original *Sonic Adventure*, which, with its exploration elements, felt like an adventure. *Sonic Adventure 2* should have been called *Sonic Action*, because that is what it is: an action game.

But my slight beef with the game is not that it is something other than its name implies, but that it still has the same feeling of being unfinished that plagued the original *Sonic Adventure*, which, because of its ambition and new hardware, was more easily overlooked. But even on GameCube, there are collision and camera issues that are rather frustrating. Twice I was forced to reset as Sonic became trapped between polygons and fell through the level and, on more than one occasion, the camera simply got stuck behind a wall, forcing me to struggle blindly to dislodge it.

If I'm making the game sound sort of awful, I don't mean to, because I do like *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle*. It's much closer to the original Sonic games in intent, capturing the intense feeling of speed in 3D that was so exhilarating in 2D. The Sonic and Shadow (Sonic's dark counterpart) levels are almost incredible in their speed and size as they loop and soar. It's this very speed that probably causes Sonic Team such collision headaches. I like the Knuckes/Rouge levels a little less, as I never enjoyed the concept of flying around looking for gems, but the Tails/Eggman shooting levels are quite fun.

Finally, I come to what many may be curious about, and that is the changes between the Dreamcast and GameCube versions of the game: They lean toward the minor side. The first great difference has nothing to do with the game itself, but with the controller. The GC pad, being vastly superior to the DC's, immediately makes *Sonic Adventure* more pleasurable to play. Actual changes include easier-to-manage Chaos (the little AI critters), as you can now see quantitatively the changes that feeding and merging animals has on them, and through the Game Boy Advance link cable, the ability to train Chaos on the GBA with a copy of *Sonic Advance* (clever). And if you're wondering about the *Battle* suffix, as its name implies, there are now more two-player competitive stages over the Dreamcast version.

Sonic Adventure 2 is a good game that is not significantly better on GameCube. It is of course very nice that it exists, but I can't help wondering how it would have turned out had it been developed originally for GC. Perhaps we will find out with *Sonic Adventure 3*.

TIMOTHY PIKE



NINTENDO GAMECUBE

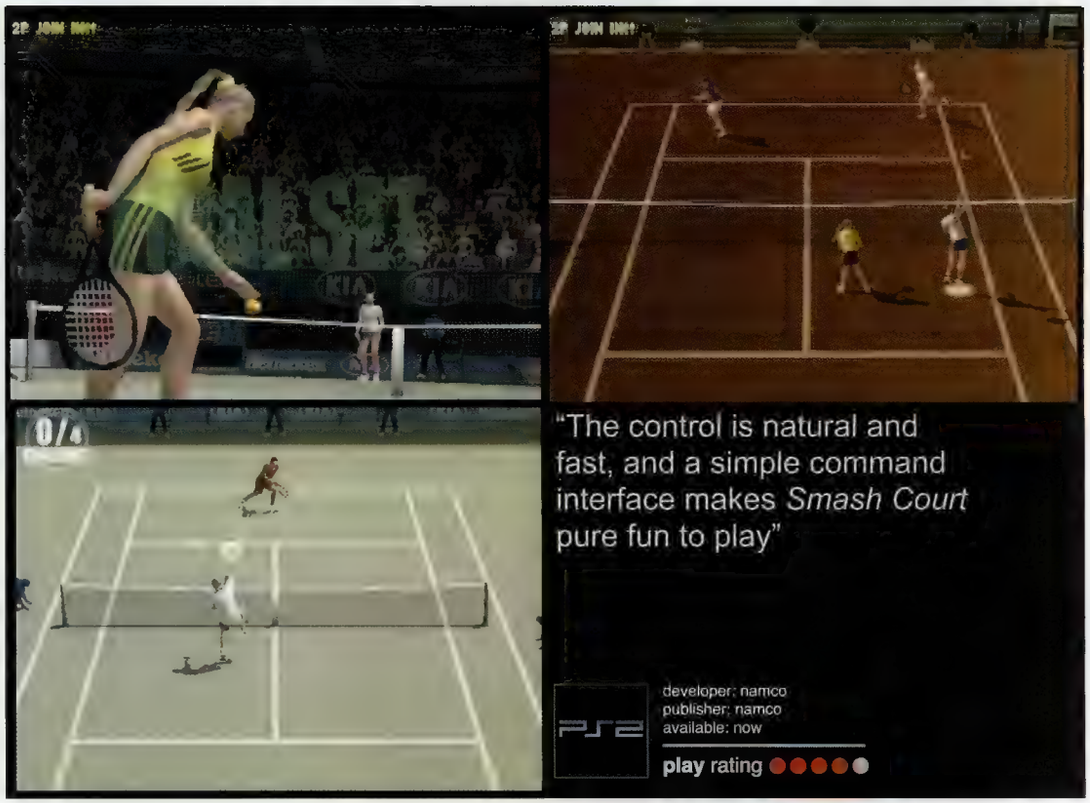
SONIC ADVENTURE 2 BATTLE

play rating

developer: sonic team publisher: sega available: now

Sonic Adventure was an imperfect game on Dreamcast and it remains so on GameCube. It still has redeeming qualities however, and the new Battle stages are worthwhile

SMASH COURT



Last month, I extolled the virtues of *MotoGP 2*, saying, "There's nothing quite like a Namco racing game." It would seem that Namco can now lay claim to an all-together different genre, and I can say, "There's nothing quite like a Namco tennis game."

Not known for making sports titles, Namco has just delivered a fantastic one with *Smash Court*. Featuring a great selection of some of the sport's most popular athletes, like Martina Hingis, Monica Seles, Anna Kournikova, Pete Sampras, and Andre Agassi, *Smash Court* already has a leg up on its most obvious competitor, *Sega Tennis 2K2* on Dreamcast. And as good as that game is, *Smash Court* is just that little bit better, thanks in part to Namco's stellar presentation skills.

Like all their efforts, *Smash Court* is a beautifully presented game, from the match intros down to the fonts used throughout. The in-game graphics, with its perfect player animation and oh-so-subtle real-time scuff marks on the courts, are easily the best seen in a tennis game. And true to form, this window-dressing supports a wonderful game. Control is natural and fast, and a simple command interface makes *Smash Court* pure fun to play, with enough finesse within this simplicity to allow for some terrific matches.

TIMOTHY PIKE

HOT SHOTS GOLF 3



When you think stroke play, think *Hot Shots 3*, Sony's ultimate game of golf that, with each evolution, continues to somehow get better and better. This year, besides drop-dead gorgeous visuals (those trees! that water!), perfecto controls, and umpteen modes of play, *Hot Shots* features a serious network mode. Using the password provided when you register at hotshotsgolf3.scea.com, you can log on and compete against wannabe golfers from all over the country. Toggling replays and messing with the camera, the freedom of movement and measure of set-up you can achieve with each shot sets *Hot Shots* apart. That and the fact that the courses actually possess a level of diversity, like mountain and city, help *Hot Shots* break the stigma associated with 90% of videogame golf. The coolest thing about *Hot Shots*, though, has to be the crazy caddies. Each time you drive, they jet after the ball like Benny Hill on a caffiene bender, kicking up dust and generally freaking out. And for you old-school gamers out there, get a load of Tiffany's training caddy. It's the first level boss from the import *DJ Boy*... she lives! She doesn't emit projectile gasses, but she's looking pretty good on the PS2.

DAVE HALVERSON

GRAN TURISMO CONCEPT 2001 TOKYO

Polyphony Digital delivers the ultimate car fantasy yet again, this one looking to the future

One of the great appeals of *Gran Turismo* is its fantasy quotient. Financially unavailable cars can be yours for the driving, to the tune of great graphics and sterling control. Now, *GT* developers Polyphony Digital have given fans a gift of sorts in *Gran Turismo Concept 2001 Tokyo*, a bonus game featuring not only financially unavailable cars, but physically unobtainable cars in the guise of concepts from the 2001 Tokyo Motor Show.

Contrary to previous suggestions, this is not an add-on pack requiring a save from *Gran Turismo A-Spec* to work. It is a low-cost, stand-alone title for the Japanese market, with none of the tournaments, tweaking, and money of the full game. You simply race (and take some single-lap license tests) in various classes to open the multitude of flashy cars. Some, like Mazda's RX 8 and Nissan's Fairlady Z (350Z), will be available soon, but it's the cars that will probably never come out that are of the most interest here. Strange devices like the Toyota pod and the awesome Honda Dualnote (a hybrid gas/electric supercar) are a real treat to drive, as is Suzuki's GSX R4, sort of a Japanese interpretation of a Lotus Elise. It goes without saying that *Gran Turismo Concept* is an incredible-looking game. The engine hasn't been upgraded because it didn't need it. The look of this game never gets old, especially when you get to experience the awesome sight of some of these cars flying around the familiar courses.

This is a must purchase for *GT* fans with Japanese PS2s, especially as it's inexpensive. No word on U.S. plans yet, but don't be surprised if some form of this game is released, perhaps a larger game with cars from forthcoming U.S. and European motor shows.

PETER GARDEN



Just a small sampling of some of the awesome cars in GT Concept. Far upper left is the Suzuki GSX R4, and above, the Nissan Skyline concept, R34.

developer: polyphony digital
publisher: sony
available: now

play rating

GIVE ME A HARD COPY

Sony Tapis MPR-505

Just released in Japan, the Sony Tapis lets PlayStation 2 owners print screen images directly from the game system. Unfortunately, the printer does not work with just any game—titles must support the printer. Currently, only three games can use the printer (all of them obscure), but smaller, high-quality developers like Irem, ArtDink and Idea Factory have all pledged support. Can't wait to print those *R-Type* screens.



JAPAN'S TOP TEN (as of 01/20/02)

Dengeki Console Ranking

1. Gran Turismo Concept ps2
2. Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zion ps2
3. Momotaru Dentei X ps2
4. Super Smash Bros. DX gc
5. Crash Bandicoot 4 ps2
6. Animal Forest gc
7. World Soccer Winning Eleven Final Edition ps2
8. Bravo Music: Famous Music Edition ps2
9. Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy ps2
10. Battle Network Rockman EXE 2 gba

MAX FACTOR



Capcom's tradition of platforming excellence reaches beyond 2D into a vivid new 3D landscape

by dave halverson



Developed in America by Capcom Digital Studios using character designs from acclaimed *Famitsu* cover artist Susumu Matsushita, *Maximo* is *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* revisited in superb 3D. It is so spectacularly produced that it captivates from the moment you press start up until the last, fatal encounter. The unending attention to detail and precise, intuitive control, coupled with superb character and level design, a grand traditional soundtrack, and seamless animation make it the new standard for 3D action-platform gaming. In terms of pure "feel," you'll be hard-pressed to find a game that is even in its league.

I've been on the *Maximo* bandwagon since E3, so rather than blow more smoke up his chain mail (like I'm not), I decided to dedicate some real estate to a detailed look at a sampling of areas from the game's five hubs, save for Castle Maximo itself. Whether you're seeking level mastery (is there any other way?) or are perhaps still on the fence regarding adding *Maximo* to your phat PS2 collection, maybe I can help tip the scales. Of course, if you could care less either way, simply skip to the last page for my sappy 5-star review. But don't forget to look at the pretty pictures along the way.

Returning from a long battle, Maximo finds his kingdom in complete disarray. His trusted friend and advisor, Achillies, has whipped up some wicked sorcery and turned the place into a seething hellhole. He's banished the royal council (four Playboy bunny-looking hotties—Maximo obviously knows how to party) and begun drilling into the underworld to amass more supernatural power to drive his undead army. He's even forced Maximo's would-be bride Sophia to marry him. When he kills Maximo, though—that's where he draws the line! Hurling into the afterlife, Maximo is intercepted by the Grim Reaper, who's none too happy about Achillies cleaning out his installed user base. So he makes a pact with Maximo: free the sorceresses and stop Achillies' tirade and he'll return him to the land of the living.

MAXIMO
Ghosts To Glory

HUB BONEYARD

Grave Danger

You begin your quest in Grave Danger, which ultimately deposits Maximo into the game's first hub. Like any good first level, the key here is to introduce you to the game's rudimentary dynamics. But don't take it too lightly; the place crawls, and there are a few secrets to unearth. First, using the double jump, collect all the coins you can and grab the key (for coming in!) to the main gate. Just beyond the gate on Maximo's left you'll see the first concealed path. Always be on the lookout for these, and always take them. The game is loaded with secrets and power-ups that can make the difference between the afterlife and death. You start with three Lock Spots for accumulated special attacks, and the quicker you fill them, the better. If you have more than you can lock-in, make sure to manage them so that you don't lose your favorite attacks when you perish. As you slay each boss, you get one more lock spot. Just ahead to the right, you'll come across a locked crypt. Take the adjacent ledge, break through in the obvious place, and then use your downward strike to break through the tomb (if you need one, there's a potion behind it). Just beyond the crypt lies another hidden path surrounded by exposed earth. Jump or double jump constantly to keep from being grabbed until you hit grass (damn undead—so grabby). Raid the chests and move on. Be careful, though, some chests bite, and if you die and come back, they all will, unless you start from your last save. Down the road you can't help but notice that the Earth is splitting, revealing fiery chasms. Use R1 and have a look for caves underneath. Before leaving Grave Danger, jump off the bridge to nab the gem in the river, open every chest, and be extra careful around the end-level pillar. They are always heavily guarded by a groundswell of rushing ghouls.

The enemies here are but a sampling of what lies ahead, but don't underestimate them. Regular skeletons shatter with one regular hit, but sword-wielding skeletons block and counter. If you have Mighty Blow, you can take 'em out with one hit; otherwise, block and counter yourself, or chip away at them, withdrawing with each blow. Once a skeleton is down, a downward strike will always finish them off. Zombies and zombie halves may seem slow, but they're not. They come at you like you're an Iron Maiden concert. Avoiding enemies is a bad strategy. They often hold keys and valuable power-ups.
The Grim Reaper doesn't take American Express, so you have to free spirits to earn Death Coins, which he'll gladly exchange for your life. To free all of the spirits, use your downward strike wherever you see their blue glow.

Coffin Canyon

The first chasm cracks open just a few steps in, revealing a hidden cave. Jump down and grab the goods, but be on the look out for spirit-sucking specters. Where's Bill Murray when you need him? Next, just beyond the two skull-spewing pillars, kill all the skeletons in the area before the path veers left. You'll need to hop around in the exposed patch on the right to raise the skeleton that has a key. Now, before you enter the uphill trail with the skull post in it, look up, and you'll see a chest on top of the arch. Platform up at the entrance, from left to right, and use the key to grab some armor. You can now jump down from here and avoid the skull post. Just beyond, making your way along the ridge, stay your ground when the ghost and first skeleton come at you. Kill them both and then head for the gem. The ground falls out quickly, so try to land right on it and then jump away. Don't forget to collect the one-up here, and then move on. The next plateau is a little tricky. Kill the first guard by throwing your shield to get his attention and then jumping his axe with a downward strike (if you don't have Throw Shield, just down-strike him to death). Just as you step in front of the gate on your left, an axe-throwing skeleton will pop up on the right. The earth drops out just in front of him, so double jump his axe to trigger the quake and then hit him as soon as you land. Take out the next skeleton on the ledge from below (jump and strike), and then grab the lovely Midas Shield. Suck up all the coins on the left with it to avoid more quaking and then make for the checkpoint. Now go back and open the gate if you have a key, which you should. If you don't, that last guard should have one, otherwise you can just let him hang. He's already dead anyway. You can buy armor here for 150, if you need it, and acquire the Magic Bolt (another fine power-up). Moving beyond the same checkpoint the bridge ahead leading into the crypt yard crumbles under your feet, so run and double jump to get across. Through the next gate (kill the guard to get the key), there are two crypts. Jump through the back window of the one to Maximo's right and you'll find a hidden chest, but you'll need a key. The guard nearby has one. Now jump through the back of the middle crypt and hit the switch to raise the ground leading to the end of the level. It's guarded by five-sword wielding skeletons, so be prepared with your spin attack or down strikes.





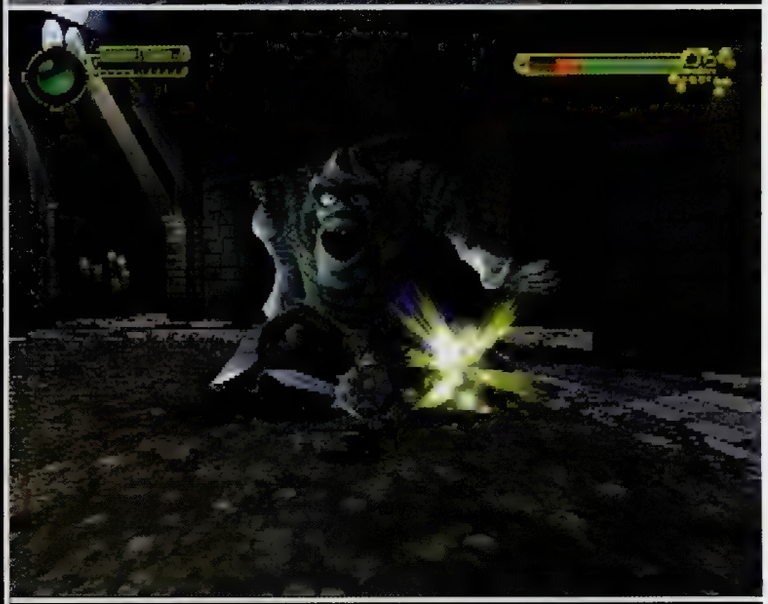


Dead Heat

First turn around and jump through the window (or just go around). There's a graveyard behind you. If you need a key, see the skeleton on your left facing out. First, kill the crow. Whenever you see a crow, kill it. They're evil, diseased, gem stealers and should be retired immediately when spotted. Clean out the graveyard and make for the sinking crypt. Hopping through the first gate, you'll see a chest on the right and a potion on the left. The key is just above the chest. In the exposed earth around that key, you can trigger a skeleton who has another, and a nearby zombie in the area has one too (apparently a lot of locksmiths were buried here)—enough to open the chest, crypt, and graveyard. The 150 coin mystery prize in the graveyard is an extra life. Next, beyond the first fire pit enter the crypt on the right after clearing the skeleton portal and jump through the window. There's a secret path leading to a locked chest. If you need a key, there's one just in front of the crypt. In the next fire pit, jump past the skull pillar, hit the checkpoint, and then double back and a chest will emerge beside the post-more armor! Grab the key from the skeleton guarding the main gate and enter the crypt yard. Jump around like a freak at the foot of the wall just ahead of you (the back of the crypt), and a locked chest will emerge, giving you even more armor! There's a skeleton portal here and one sword-wielding skeleton with a key towards the back of the yard. The two crypts on the right are catch-22s. They each take a key to open and, give you another key. One has a few coins as well and one, three crazed skeletons. The middle crypt holds the key to the main gate. There's a well-hidden potion behind the door too, if you need it. Through the next gate, the last tree on the left has a chest beside it you can coax to the surface, and then it's a straight shot to the heavily guarded last crypt. May I recommend the spin attack?







Boss Ghastly Gus the Gravedigger

The Boneyard boss, Ghastly Gus the Gravedigger, goes down pretty easy, but he's so fun to look at you may want to run around for awhile and just admire him. Down-strike twice or throw your shield to hit his exposed toes, and then slash him when he reacts. Three of these and he packs it in. When the sorceress offers you a kiss, a save, or armor, remember that having all four kisses at the end of the game gets you a sweet surprise. Once the Bone Yard is behind you it's onto The Great Dank.

HUB THE GREAT DANK

Watery Grave

If you opted for the sorcerer's kiss, you need to jet through Watery Grave unscathed and go save. If you have the Midas Shield, jump up to the tree house, grab your key, and suck down the gem you can't reach on the stalk you jumped up on. The second tree on your right (facing the same way) has one hidden behind it, too. You can get a chest to emerge beside the tree behind the treehouse as well. Take a moment to notice the footsteps here, changing tome when going from the wood planks to the dirt. Talk about perfection. Moving on, chop through two sets of vines and then, before veering left, notice the hidden path to the right. There's only a spirit stone in here, but every little bit counts. Back on the path you'll come to another small swamp. Before you open the next gate, jump around by the palm in the swamp at the lower left of the stairs (facing the gate), and another chest will emerge. Entering the large crypt yard through the gate, jump up on the low ledge opposite the fountain and grab the key and one-up over head. Next, go around the crypts on the left and take the river in back to a key in the last crypt on your left. Coming back, go across the yard through the open gate, and use a key to grab the sword power-up in the locked crypt on your far right. Now use your other key on the far crypt to grab the armor. To the right of that crypt use the stalk to jump up onto the wall. From here you can reach the Lenores Mask located on top of the first crypt on your left as you walked in. Next, from the same spot: see that one-up two crypts down river? Double jump from the far right part of the wall and you can make it. Before leaving this little bog, clean out the crypts (the first needs a key and the second has some hidden coin by the right front) and then head for home. Remember, where there's bubbles there's alligators. Wait till they chomp twice, then use a down strike. Two hits and they're on their way to the boot factory.

Dem Bones

If you've hung onto the Long Sword and Midas Shield, now's the time to use them. Sucking in loot from the thick tar-like swamps beats wading around in the zombie infested swill. Once you're in the soup you can only emerge where there's a dirt patch or white spot on a bone. But there is much to be had in the tar, including one-ups, armor and gems, so Maximo is getting wet. Facing the first massive valley, the switch to reach the other side is located in the rib cage on your left. After hitting it, jumping from the rock that rises up as a result, take note of the vine-covered opening on your left. As soon as you get close, a Rogue Wizard ambushes you and turns you into an old geezer. Since there's an axe-throwing skeleton nearby, this is not a good thing. Preempt the bastard and quickly double jump over and take him out. Kill the skeleton and then go through the vines. Clear the small cave on the other side by jumping its bones and then, if you need armor, kill the big poison flower by the locked chest on your left as you leave the cave. But don't proceed up river. Instead, head back out of the cave toward the checkpoint. Beyond the checkpoint you'll see a gem floating in the tar. Make for it and then crawl out of the ooze onto the dirt patch just ahead. From here you can jump into the other valley wall and clean it out. Jump from one of the holes in the valley wall back onto the original path and head back past the cave. The last stretch of swamp is full of secrets, so comb it. Beyond the intact dinosaur bones, the skull up river has armor in the mouth and, if you turn around, a gem in the north-facing eye socket. Just ahead, after killing the two poisonous flowers as you exit the swamp, look up and to your left, and you'll see another gem on the ledge above.

If your next stop is Voodoo Village, be sure and check behind you when you arrive and above behind and below every last hut. You'll be doing a spot of platforming, too. The key to mastering The Quick and the Dead is in the ledges. Use the walls to your advantage and make sure you wear full armor into the midstream tunnel.









Boss Bokor La Bas

The Great Dank boss, Bokor La Bas, is fast and freaky-deaky. After he shrinks you (which he seems to take great pleasure in), just run. When you turn back to normal size, hit each clone after he splits to equal one hit. Between each hit he shoots fire and voodoo dolls. Block or dodge the fire spurts and then whack the dolls. If you have full here armor, you can't lose.



HUB GRAVEYARD OF SHIPS

Shiver Me Timbers

If, once again, you have opted for a sorcerers kiss (and Mamba Marie's hooters should convince you it's the right thing to do), you're no doubt fixated on the next save. Between you and that sigh of relief lies Shiver Me Timbers, Maximo's first icy pirate stage, where things begin to get a bit tougher. First of all, it's slippery, and the enemies are particularly nasty. Give a skeleton a bomb and he thinks he's Joe Montana. Throw Shield (well, any projectile) is like gold against these guys as it blows them up, and their bomb. Anyway, as you begin Shiver Me Timbers, turn around jump up above the start point and collect some armor. Luckily Shiver Me Timbers is a somewhat short straightforward level. You can come back for mastery, the trick here is just getting through. There's ample armor floating about, should you get in a bind. Watch for bombers and don't bother finishing off skewered pirates with a downward strike, as stabbing them when they are down, stabs you. Knock them down and move on unless you have a projectile or the Lenores Mask switched on, which, if you have it, is easy to do in this area.

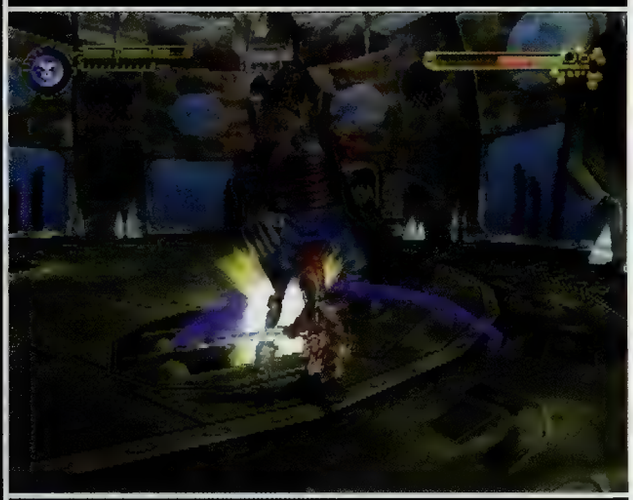
Go With the Floe

You know you can do it. Just behind you, you can buy a silver shield; just above you awaits some shiny armor, so jump up on the outer arch and grab it. Just ahead you'll come to a series of platforms, hop up and claim your loot, making sure to explore the whole area. Dead ahead (lil' pun there), you'll notice a low road and a high road. Take the low road first to grab the gem and key by the falls, but don't try the obvious straight-across jump on these platforms. Jump forward, left, then up. On the way back ignore the platform the gem was on and jump straight back. Take the platforms back to the high road and make for the falls. You can reach that same key from up here too, and then go for the gem on your way back. Keep track of your momentum when negotiating floating icebergs. The mystery 150-up here is a silver shield. Beyond the next checkpoint, as you break thru the first wall, look up and you'll see another key in a whole in the ice. This room has four openings. From the left, the first, guarded by a yeti, holds a silver shield for 150; the second gives you coins and armor; the middle lets out to the next area; and the right side, guarded by another yeti, contains a chest with armor and a sword enchantment. Leaving the room, veer left and jump up to the top of the cave. From up here (on the right side), you can slide down and grab that key. Leave again and make your way up river. The darker icebergs sink, so don't dilly dally, just jump. On the ice ahead you'll notice a gem hovering over a hole in the ice: double jump and grab it, then slide ahead into the little nook. A downward strike here will unearth a chest containing two more gems. Next take the ledge up to the valley with the frozen ship (pretty cool, eh?). Jump onto the ship from either side, and grab the key from the bow, and the armor from the chest mid ship before leaving.





Yetis can do a lot of damage, but they look a lot tougher than they actually are. One strike with an enchanted blade and they're toast; wait for them to raise there arms and attack the midsection twice to finish them off. If they do get off an attack, go wide; they cover a lot of ground. While you're in their midst, check out the amazing model before you. Is that a magnificent beast or what? How awesome is this game?



Boss Captain Cadaver

To hang up the cranky Graveyard boss, Captain Cadaver, throw your shield and knock him into a grate, then once he's stuck, kneel and strike his wooden leg. If you don't have Throw Shield, you'll have to get close and knock him into a grate. Stay close and deal with his anchor blow rather than far away—he's a really great shot. I know, those sorceresses kisses are getting expensive, but think of the payoff.

HUB REALM OF SPIRITS

Internal Devices

First stop, Infernal Devices, where Maximo swings into full gear. Your old-school platforming skills will be put to the test while your eyes gaze at the glory. Incredible floating structures float among a hypnotic swirling orange sky. With spinning gears, slicing blades, swinging slashers, bouncy brain pads, clasping traps, and platforms going in every direction, this is serious business. The enemies—mischievous hammer orcs, charging minotaurs, floating spirits, and mad bombers—are relentless, waiting for you in all the wrong places, and the level design places you in some of the most amazing, most precarious places you can possibly imagine. The Realm of Spirits represents the best platforming since the gaming world went 3D.

Once you deal with Lord Gutterscum, it's off to the land of the living—and the final hub, Maximo's Castle. Here, your adventure will ultimately come to an end as you face the man that stole your bride and killed you dead, Achillies.





Maximo is a true masterpiece—a labor of love, made by people who not only love games, but know what it takes to make one that is truly memorable. *Maximo* has earned his place among the videogame elite. It holds you in its grasp from start to finish, and then you'll probably want to play it all over again.

PS2

MAXIMO

play rating

developer: capcom publisher: capcom available: now

Maximo sets the bar high for 3D platformers to come while Capcom Digital Studios join the ranks among America's most elite developers.

FREEZER FRESH

Gaming gears up for the next big thing in CGI cinema

The first-ever action-platform game to star a wooly mammoth ridden by a kid with a funny head is shaping up very nicely. Based on the next digitally animated feature film poised to rake in *Shrek*-sized receipts, UbiSoft's *Ice Age* is being readied for the GBA to hit simultaneously with the film this March. At first glance, the game looks and sounds as peculiar and fascinating as the movie trailer that's been captivating audiences for months. Old-school Psygnosis-style 2D (anyone remember *Puggsy* for Sega CD?) melded with oddly mesmerizing storybook melodies give the game a freaky quality I can't quite put my finger on.

The actual play mechanics are just as curious. Cueing in on three characters from the film, you play the majority of the levels as Manny, a wooly mammoth (voiced by Ray Romano in the film), controlling his moves with the A button, and Roshan, his unlikely human passenger, with R. For the most part, Manny takes care of the enemies while Roshan jumps up and grabs the Manny fuel (acorns) the enemies leave behind, or take out the critters overhead that Manny can't reach. In the game's speedier forced scrolling levels, you play as Sid the sloth (voiced by John Leguizamo in the film), jumping, sliding and spinning, working diligently to keep from getting swallowed up by the screen's momentum. The levels are pretty short, but there's a hundred of them (!) with a boss every 10 that'll conjure images of those Core Design 16-bit bosses of old.

Ice Age may feel like the brainchild of old Psygnosis and Core staffers, but it's from little known A2M, whom I'll now have to look up. I especially like the move where Manny and Roshan's hair stand on end as they ride stinky green skunk juice; there's something you don't see everyday. Keep your eye on this one.

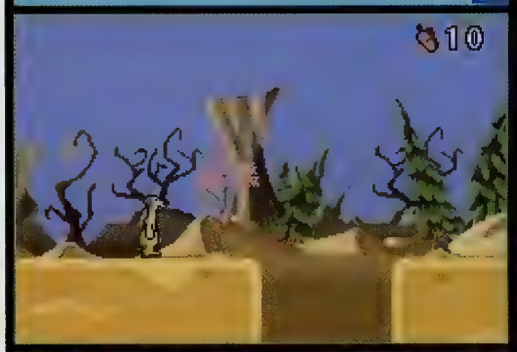
DAVE HALVERSON













GAME BOY ADVANCE

ICE AGE

developer: A2M publisher: Ubi Soft available: q1

preview

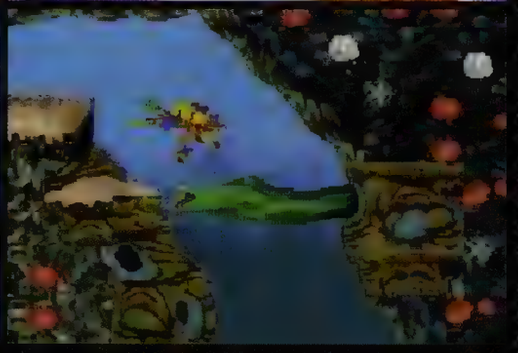
I can pretty much guarantee you've never played anything quite like it. *Ice Age* is definitely the best kid-riding-a-hairy-elephant-game ever created!

CRASH BANDICOOT:THE HUGE ADVENTURE









play rating ●●●●●

developer: vicarious visions
publisher: universal interactive
available: q1

Once again, the fate of the Earth rests in the hands of a wooden mask and an orange rodent—and it's still better than Al Gore.

Selected to stuff Crash Bandicoot into the GBA's small screen, Vicarious Visions—one of the premier developers for the machine—has made the most of the opportunity with *Crash Bandicoot: The Huge Adventure*. Turning their shrinking-ray loose on the *Crash* universe, they've produced a great-looking, incredible-sounding portable platformer. Drawing from both the recent *Wrath of Cortex* mold and Crash's three PlayStation bids, the game rests on the tried-and-true, easy-to-grasp, tough-to-master *Raiders-of-the-Lost-Bandicoot*-style framework. Negotiating space ports, jungles, dank sewers, networks of underwater tunnels, temples, and snowy caverns is the name of the game, and all of the usual nuances apply: bonus levels, extra gems for crashing every crate, and a new move each time Crash beats a minion of Cortex. And when you're not crate-crashing or scuba diving, you can feast your eyes on two variations of classic Crash, portable-3D style. The forward chase and blimp-shooting scenarios both look incredible. Crash and Cortex's latest batch of goons are brought to life through nicely animated and shaded renders, while the backgrounds, enriched with plenty of vitamin P, are hand drawn. On this season's boss menu, Dingodile, N. Gin, and Tiny are all among the combatants, and, in fitting style, put up a formidable fight.

My only beef is that the majority of the side-scrolling is of the straight-ahead variety. I'd like to have seen more variation, like the layers Naughty Dog gave us in the PSone original. Otherwise, this is a great, little game. Vicarious Visions cranks up the difficulty considerably in the later levels and really puts your skills to the test. And if you're limited as to how many games you can take home each month, there's a lot to go back and master to unearth the game's secrets. As they did with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, Vicarious Visions has shown us, once again, that when it comes to pumping out quality GBA games, they're top dog.

DAVE HALVERSON

SCORPION KING:SWORD OF OSIRIS





Leaving the smelly *Mummy Returns* franchise behind, The Rock, on his way to becoming our next great action hero (next to Vin Diesel), can be proud of his second appearance in an action game, in Universal Interactive's *The Scorpion King: Sword of Osiris*. I don't know much (yet) about the developer, WayForward Technologies, but something tells me they came up during the heyday of 16-bit. *Scorpion King* is a slice of old-school 2D that combines elements of *Rastan* and *Castlevania*. The play mechanics (hold the attack button when Mathayas sits idle and he twirls his weapon; he has a wall jump, a downward strike and he grapples) are all straight out of the classic 16-bit platforming mold. Combined with excellent art and animation, misty parallax skies, and striking, detailed hand-drawn visuals, *The Scorpion King* looks like one of the best GBA games of the new year.

DAVE HALVERSON

preview

developer: wayforward technologies
publisher: universal interactive
available: q2

BOMBERMAN





Ecks, an ex-FBI agent, and Sever, a professional assassin, are locked in mortal combat—and the story unfolds to amazing effect in first-person mode. Ecks vs. Sever is, by every degree, the strongest FPS to reach a handheld, far exceeding what the mobile version of Doom set in motion. Variations on levels, for instance, add welcomed variety (players can choose to play as either Ecks or Sever, each with 12 unique, parallel missions); and the frame-rate is solid, considering it was built from the ground up for the GBA (unlike Doom, which was merely resurrected from an early '90s incarnation). Even when linked into a four-player frag fest, the graphics barely stutter. Tight controls (easy strafing and firing), surprisingly effective audio samples (funky techno and realistic gunshots), and smooth character animation (fluid enemy reactions) round out this package.

JON M GIBSON

preview

developer: crawfish
publisher: bam!
available: now

BREATH OF FIRE





Compared to other RPGs on GBA, Breath of Fire isn't exactly king of the mountain. Its transition from SNES to the comfort of the handheld, however, is flawless in execution. The now-classic folklore of Ryu, decedent of the Light Dragon Clan, may feel aged to many—especially when compared to games like Advance Wars or the spectacular Golden Sun—but gameplay is the strongest consideration here. A tight battle system (organized drop-down actions cater to the on-the-go habits of the GBA) and a fairly engrossing story (yet still dry compared to progressive Breath of Fire installments) will hopefully keep most players content. But, just in case, Capcom has also added few extra umphs to the package: the visuals have taken on a fresher, more colorful look, and the "save" feature, once limited to certain locations, has been updated for travel junkies—now you can record your journeys anywhere. A feature much appreciated, indeed.

JON M GIBSON

play rating

developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: now

MEGA MAN EXTREME





Though not exactly old-school Mega Man—and I'm referring to the iconic, blue-drenched cyber boy from the NES—the X franchise definitely hits the mark. But this is Xtreme, not the indispensable SNES carts that reside on my "all-time" list, so a few too many liberties have been taken. The level design is fresh, even though each stage is a condensed, blended concoction from X, X2 and X3; and the continuation of last year's Xtreme storyline is fitting (the origin of Zero and Iris meeting). But the controls are still an issue, considering the Game Boy Color doesn't have the control scheme that the X-enhanced version of Mega Man needs: the SNES had an extremely valuable four buttons, plus shoulder controls; on this portable version, awkward button combinations are often utilized. Whatever its flaws, this cartridge is merely a precursor to Capcom's inaugural Mega Man side-scroller on GBA, Zero—and it should effortlessly tide over the anxious fans.

JON M GIBSON

play rating

developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: now

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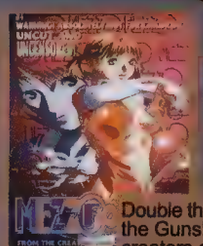

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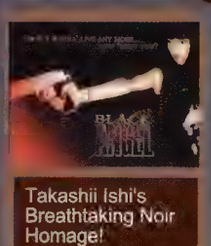
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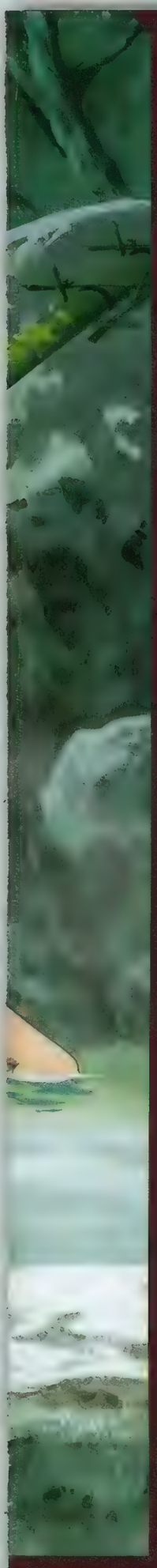


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talk to the hand



In celebration of Vampire D: Bloodlusts transition to the small screen we've put together an interview triad including director Yoshiaki Kwawjiri, character designer Yutaka Minowa, and Maestro Marco D'Ambrosio. The DVD is a true celebration of this masterful animated work and includes a behind the scenes featurette, storyboard to feature comparisons, theatrical trailers and TV spots, and, as they say, much, much more. D is a modern tale of vampires and powerful evil but it's as much about hope and love. All brought to life through masterful animation, splendid character designs and a truly epic soundtrack, it's a film event not to be missed. So without further ado Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust.

// the director: yoshiaki kawajiri

Congratulation on a spectacular film and one of the best opening sequences in history. How much of that was CGI?

Only about six or seven percent.

Incredible. It looked like more. Bloodlust is character-driven more so than the original, and to great effect. How would you categorize D as a leading man?

"Vampire Hunter D" is a Dark-Hero. He's very charismatic.

Perhaps you could catch us up on Leila. Between riding off with D and her death, we learn little about her life. Have you thought about making her story?

That would be a great story, but it wouldn't match with the "Vampire Hunter D" world.

She's a great character. As much as it is gothic horror, D is as much a compelling romance with a love-conquers -all message. What led you in this direction?

The combination of Gothic Horror and romance is the most important element for a Vampire Story, but I wanted the piece to have a strong human element as well.

Were you inspired by any Western cinema growing up?

Of course, there are so many of them, but especially George Roy Hill's films— "Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid" and "The Sting."

Interesting choices. D was the first major anime originally recorded in English, and it seems to have had quite a positive impact on the final product here in America. Was it as well received in Japan with Japanese subtitles?

I have heard many people say they like it very much because the foreign movie feel and visual image match up so well with a Western dialect.

In the four years it took to develop this film, what was your biggest challenge?

To explain the images and actions to the American sound staff.

D was made for far less than a US animated production, yet it looks as good or better. If you had a Disney-sized budget (50 to 100 million), what would you do differently?

Basically there would be no difference. But if we did have more time, I would like to have had more time to create visual images in the early stages.

Wow, that's amazing. Does Bloodlust have a villain in your eyes?

It's not a traditional Good Guy Bad Guy story, but if I must, I'll say Carmila. Because she symbolizes humans wickedness– their vicious feelings.

So, will we see D again?

I want to see more, myself. It will happen if this film is successful in a business sense.



The combination of gothic horror and romance is the most important element for a vampire story



// character designer: yutaka minowa

Who are your favorite D hero and villain?

I apologize for the typical answers, but D and Meier Link.

I forgive you. The three main creeps in the movie—Benge, Carolina and Mashira— have classic horror roots but all three have super powers. Did you experiment with different monster types at all, or did you go with these three right out of the gate?

I didn't see any problem selecting the characters because they appeared in the novels. We did make considerable changes to the appearance of the characters and their abilities though (super powers), to make them attractive on film.

You tend to lean less towards exaggerated character designs, opting for regular- sized eyes and bone structure. Is this because of the dramatic nature of the D framework, or is it simply your personal style?

It's natural that drama and design influence each other, although D's design is an example of my particular style. Since his title comes from an original story, the director likely chose me as the designer to match the content of the original story and illustrations.

We've seen two statues from the movie produced for sale so far, but no Leila. Is she coming?

A Leila statue! I want one for myself. But unfortunately there is no plan for releasing it. However, D and Leila action figures will be released.

That's great news. Tell us what inspired the amazing weaponry and vehicles we see in the film. Did you come up with all of these from pure imagination, or were you inspired by a certain era?

I designed the look collecting and putting together images of 18th- and 19th- century industrial revolution machinery.

We heard that you're a big American comic fan. Who are your favorite characters?

My knowledge is quite superficial compared to a deep fan. From old comics, I like The Thing, Dr. Doom, and Galactus. More recently I like the Fantastic Four From and Hell Boy.

Any American artists or illustrators that you are a fan of or inspired by?

I get inspiration from everything, not just art, so, if I start making a list, we'd be here all day. But Specifically, if I think American artists—Bill Sienkiewicz, Adam Hughes, John Van Fleet, Kent Williams, Travis Charest, Mike Mignola, and John Paul Leon. And then Jack Kirby, who is on the next level.

We've heard rumors of a Ninja Scroll 2 being produced by Madhouse? If this is true, can you give us some inside information and will you be working on it?

Ninja Scroll was an interesting project for me. If there is a sequel, I would like to participate. As to whether the rumors are true, I'll have to ask the director about that.



I get inspiration from from everything, not just art, so, if I start making a list we'd be here all day.





// music by: marco d'ambrosio

Can you tell us a little bit about your musical background?

I think my first memories as a small child are of learning music. I started playing trumpet at 10 years old. I got interested in composing and film music in high school. For some reason, the score to "Blade Runner" flipped a very big switch in my brain, and I knew what I wanted to do, but I took what then seemed a circuitous route to get there.

I went to college to study music, but I also studied engineering (acoustics) as a double major. This was at the University of Hartford's Hartt School of Music. At the time I started college, film scoring programs had not really come about yet. I also felt that technology would play a major part in the creation of music in the future, and I was really interested in audio, so in addition to working on my musical chops, I worked hard on my technical chops. I got my first job at the college recording studio under David Budries, a great mentor and friend, recording, editing and learning a lot of classical music.

After I graduated, I worked as an acoustics engineer, still playing and creating music on my own time, occasionally taking a work sabbatical to concentrate on just music. It was during this time that the MIDI revolution was in full swing and I put together my first studio in Boston. I started getting some commissions to write scores for modern dance companies in New York and Pittsburgh.

In 1989, I was offered a technical job at Lucasfilm, to work for their THX division. During this time, I learned a lot about film sound, meeting people like Tomlinson Holman and Ben Burtt. It was Ben who gave me a shot at writing music for some of the documentaries he was working on. At this time, I was also starting to do some sound design on the THX trailers. I slowly started to get more and more work as a composer, until there was finally enough for me to do it full-time, which I've been now doing for about eight years.

So, can you say exactly what attracts you to film scoring?

Well, there are a couple of things that attract me to it. One is the ability to legally jump around in terms of genres and just be able to find a stylistic mix of elements that work for a particular film. To give you an example, I just did a live-action film called "Haiku Tunnel" with Sony Pictures. The mix, if I could define it as a genre, is punk-gamelon music. And that to me is very exciting, the ability to take all these different influences and apply it to something which might be completely different. The film "Haiku Tunnel' had nothing to do with gamelon or Indonesian music at all but it was just a really nice fit, that mixed in with some modern thrashy punk guitars seemed to work really well. So that would probably be the main reason I got into film music: mix it up.

How did you get involved with Vampire Hunter D:Bloodblust?

Mata Yamamoto, one the producers of "Vampire Hunter D," had heard some of my music for "JoJo's Bizarre Adventures," an Anime series released primarily in Japan. As a trial, he asked me to write the music and produce the sound for the short promo of VHD that came out a few years ago. He liked my work and so offered us the film. I was the composer and audio producer. Our company, MarcoCo, did the entire post-production. We created all the sound effects, music, the entire mix at our studio, and brought it to Skywalker Sound for the final mastering.

What was your musical approach to the movie?

My musical approach to the film was a hybrid one, much like the film is. I really tried to incorporate and fuse many elements and genres together, horror, classical gothic, futuristic, and being of Italian origin, even "Spaghetti Western." These were the same ideas the producers and director had. We agreed the score had to be epic in scope, and that a big, live orchestral sound was necessary, so we worked our budget to allow for that.

Was scoring an Anime different to scoring an "ordinary" American animated film or live-action?

I feel that the Anime projects I've scored are much closer to live-action films than traditional American animation. There can be seriousness about anime that doesn't play down to the audience.

How was the working process with the director/producer?

My working process with the director/producer was much like I would score a completely American live-action project. We spotted the film for music and then I would submit MIDI sketches of the cues for approval, after which I would orchestrate further and prepare the score for whatever live instruments I was planning to record. The biggest difference was that I was sending all my sketches for approval via email, CDs and videotape to Japan! Kawajiri-san, the director, Mata Yamamoto and Maruyama-san, the producers, would then make their comments, which would be translated into English and back to me. It really wasn't as difficult as it might sound, it just took a little more effort trying to understand each other at first but it was very rewarding. When Kawajiri-san came to visit from Japan for the recording sessions, I felt that we had really connected despite the language barrier. We were all after the same thing.

What are your current or upcoming projects?

There is a film I scored in U.S. theatres now, a live-action comedy called "Haiku Tunnel." I'm also currently working on the new series of "JoJo's Bizarre Adventures", which is being released in Japan on DVD. Additionally, I'm working on music for an animation short by DreamWorks/PDI and scoring a feature-length independent film which will go into the film festival circuit. You can also see some clips from a few projects I scored on our website: www.marcoco.com.

PSX year in review



Sifting through a 4 foot stack of movies, OVA's, and series anime we began the arduous process of assembling our list of 2001's very best. Many moons and heated "discussions" later we arrived at the following.

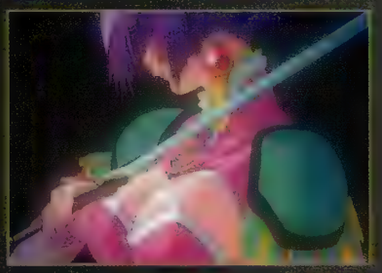
A word to those of you who aren't getting into it... Get into it!

sci-fi: 001

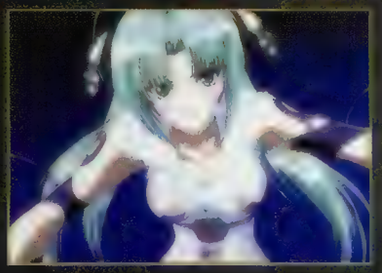
1 Neon Genesis Evangelion



2 Angel Links

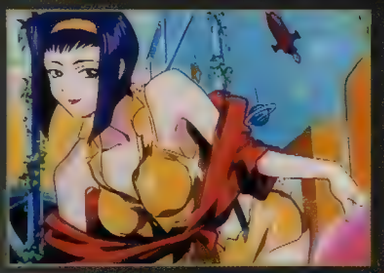


3 Pilot Candidate

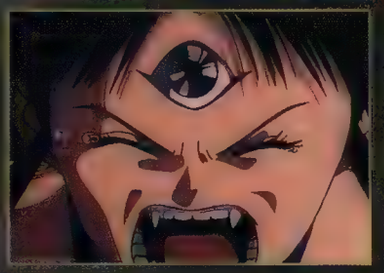


action/adventure: 002

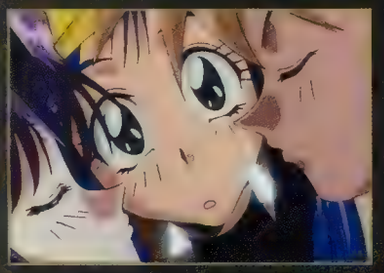
1 Cowboy Bebop



2 3x3 Eyes

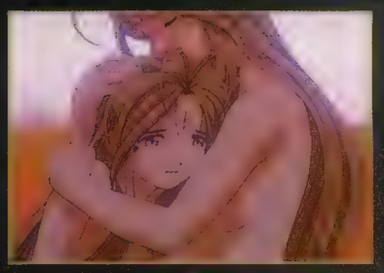


3 Saber Marionette J

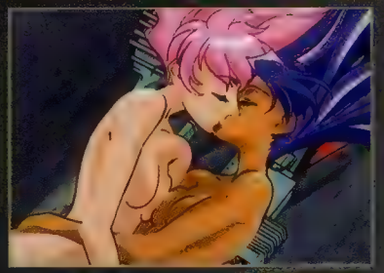


drama: 003

1 Ah! My Goddess: The Movie



2 Utena: The Movie



3 Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



comedy: 004

1 Hand Maid May



2 Amazing Nurse Nanako

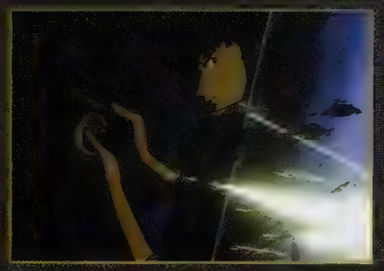


3 Jubei-chan

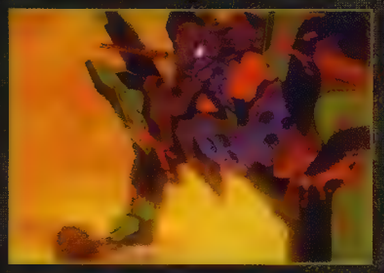


series: 005

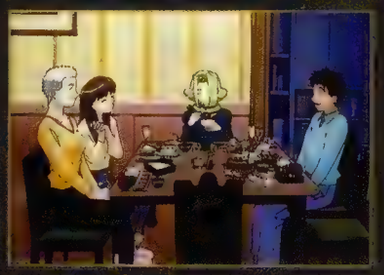
1 Cowboy Bebop



2 Neon Genesis Evangelion

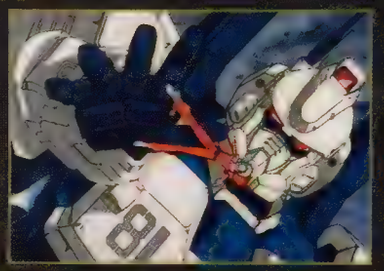


3 Parallel Dual!



mecha: 006

1 Gundam 08th MS Team



2 Robotech

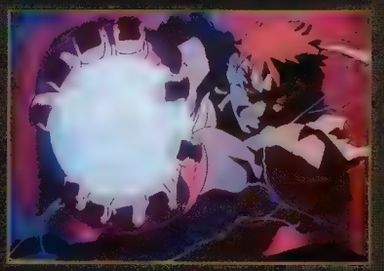


3 Pilot Candidate



video game based: 007

1 Street Fighter Alpha



2 Fatal Fury



3 Arc The Lad

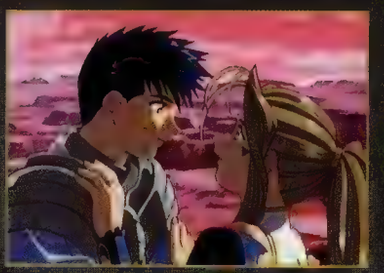


romance: 008

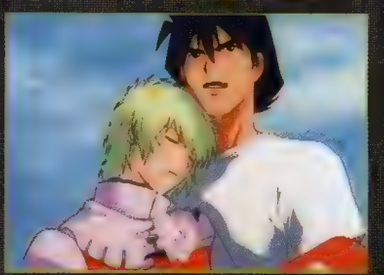
1 Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



2 Ah! My Goddess: The Movie

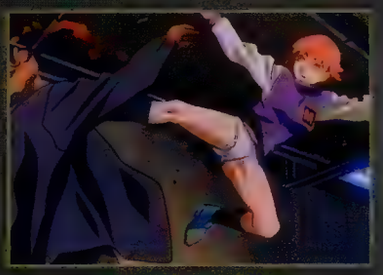


3 Gundam 08th MS Team



fan service: 009

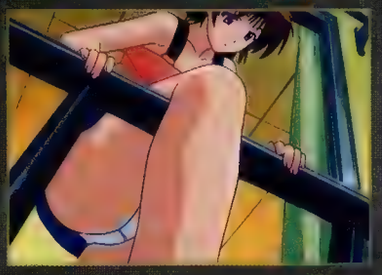
1 Mezzo Forte



2 Amazing Nurse Nanako



3 Hand Maid May

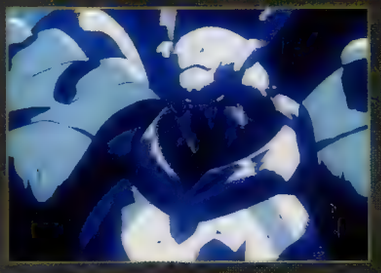


ova: 010

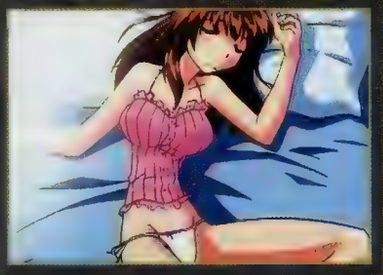
1 3x3 Eyes



2 Detonator Orgun

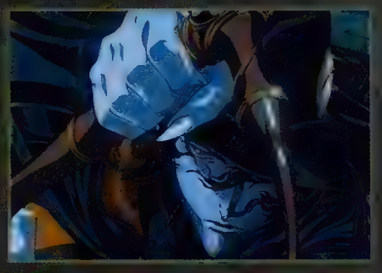


3 Amazing Nurse Nanako

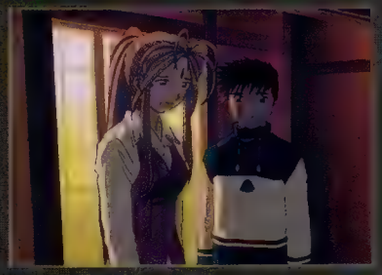


movie: 011

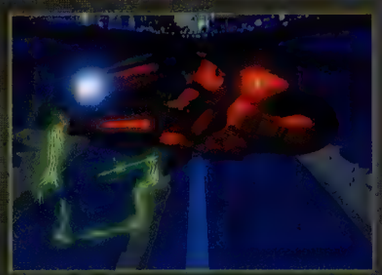
1 Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



2 Ahi My Goddess: The Movie



3 Akira

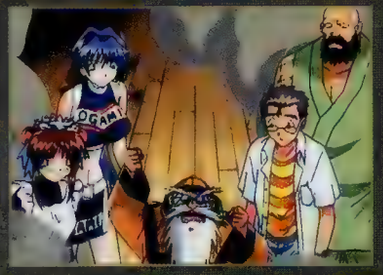


character design: 012

1 Ah! My Goddess: The Movie



2 Amazing Nurse Nanako



3 Gatekeepers



animation: 013

1. Spriggan



2. Akira



3. Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust

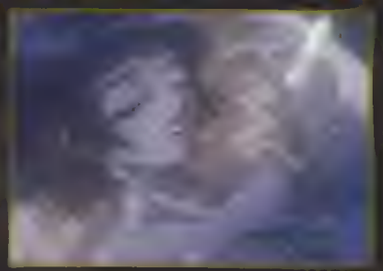


plot: 014

1. Neon Genesis Evangelion



2. Angel Links



3. Trigun



best dvd: 015

1. Ah! My Goddess: The Movie



2. Akira



3. Robotech



voice acting/dub: 016

1. Hand Maid May



2. Gundam 08th MS Team



3. Amazing Nurse Nanako



dave halverson top 10

Evolution.

As great a year this was for anime, I'm surprised it didn't finally achieve mainstream status beyond Saturday-morning kiddie fare. I thought for sure this would be the year. Instead, anime still remains the best-kept secret in entertainment. Having seen everything American theatrical and TV animation has to offer, I feel truly blessed to have partaken in series like Evangelion, Cowboy Bebop and the remarkable Gundam 08th MS Team, and films like D: Bloodlust, Ah! My Goddess, Spriggan, Revolutionary Girl Utena, and Blood. From the looks of it, 2002 is going to be even better. With the advent of digital animation and CG, as well cooperative Japan/US ventures, this amazing artform is bound for glory.

01. Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



02. Gundam 08th MS Team
03. Spriggan
04. Evangelion
05. Rev. Girl Utena Movie
06. Cowboy Bebop
07. Akira
08. Ah! My Goddess Movie
09. Detenator Orgun
10. Hand Maid May

christina alexander top 10

01. Blood: The Last Vampire



02. Rurouni Kenshin
03. Samurai X
04. Cardcaptor Sakura
05. Generator Gawl
06. Niea_7
07. Ah! My Goddess Movie
08. Trigun
09. Parallel Dual!
10. Akira

Hey Blood.

Here we are, in 2002, and computers have managed to impact nearly every artform on the planet, anime included. There was a time when computer graphics were disheartening, as hand-drawn characters collided unceremoniously with badly textured CG vehicles, failing to inspire much confidence in the viability of 2D and 3D co-existing in the same films. Yet productions such as Parallel Dual, Ah! My Goddess: The Movie, and the newly released Vandread thoroughly lay to rest any lingering uncertainty about the pairing of anime and computers. Further boding auspiciously for the future of anime, Princess Mononoke and Blood: The Last Vampire have both become striking examples of the successful combination of 2D and 3D animation. Although the days of cel ink and paint are gone, anime has never looked better.

jon m gibson top 10

Cinema boom.

As you'll quickly notice, from the top to the bottom of 2001, a cinematic presence is the key to my Top 10. The creators of *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* fused drama, romance and action—along with unbelievable artistry and an intense, cathartic score—into one indelibly rich package. *Cowboy Bebop*, even without a box-office presence, managed to squeeze the scope of the silver screen onto the Sony Wega plopped in your living room. *Akira*, of course, is the grand-daddy of anime films—luckily Pioneer expensed a huge chunk of change to preserve such a gem. A movie—or an animated series that imitates such—simply puts me in an entranced state. It's all in the mood—that special cinematic boom.

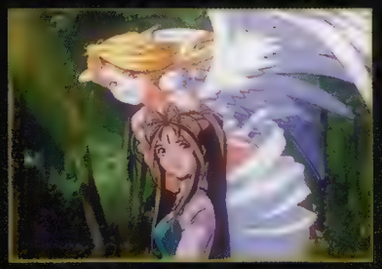
01. Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



02. Cowboy Bebop
03. Akira
04. Evangelion
05. Blood: The Last Vampire
06. Blue Gender
07. Gunsmith Cats
08. Ah! My Goddess Movie
09. The Big O
10. Trigun

nelson lui top 10

01. Ah! My Goddess Movie



02. 3x3 Eyes
03. Parallel Dual!
04. Angel Links
05. Hand Maid May
06. Jubei-chan
07. Cardcaptor Sakura
08. Mezzo Forte
09. Akira
10. Gatekeepers

Getting into it.

So kill me—my Number One wasn't a vampire anime. So let me brush the tear off my cheek and keep it in a locket—*Ah! My Goddess: The Movie* was poetic and beyond magical. This charming theatrical inception by Kousuke Fujishima, debuting nearly 10 years ago as an OVA, was well worth the wait. *3x3 Eyes*—with its overwhelming delivery of horror and romance—seals a place in the anime history books as one of the greatest stories ever told. *Parallel Dual* made me laugh till I shot soda out of my nostrils. It's an anime parody done right, poking fun at *Evangelion* and *Tenchi*. 2001 will go down as the year that Pioneer owned me!


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JIN-ROH special edition

Bandai Entertainment • 105 minutes

play rating ● ● ● ● ●



Perhaps animation's greatest gift is its ability to completely dissolve the boundary of what can be imagined, freeing an artist to create extraordinary scenes. When I watch Jin-Roh, I see a bit of something striking, something moving and inspired living in every image. Only in a somber dream does a place like Jin Roh's post-apocalyptic visions begin to exist. And here it is a nightmare. After what is known as the Great Defeat results in the pervasive ruin of the world, massively accelerated economic growth eventually fractures a society on its way to successful rebirth (the political undercurrents run thick and poignant). Riots are spreading like an insidious cancer, bands of terrorists form, and a tyrannically policed state is eventually set in place to puncture the swelling violence.

What becomes so unsettling is when we are led to feel that the Police contain some blinded sense of sincere compassion, truly believing they are the "guardians of public order," the literal saviors of a world they inadvertently hurled into the abyss. There are a number of powerful scenes–as moving as any you'll see this year in live action–that stick with us, partly because of the implications of the story, partly because the images are so haunting and effective. The director, Hiroyuki Okiura (Ghost in the Shell, Akira), has boldly proven himself a master of his craft, giving every scene a remarkable sense of tactile presence and energy, of clarity and force. You feel this movie gripping you with the terror and violence, powered by the remarkable way each scene is framed: the frightening intensity portrayed as miniguns shatter a crowd is disturbing, the quietest moments hang like a cold spirit,

The look of the film is intriguing, rich and full of fascinating details. Everything is lit in shadows. Decay and grime consume every surface. Even in the pale light of day, a gloom settles.

Not much dialogue exists between the characters, but what is said never fails to boldly express the film's ideas – there lives animalistic tendencies in us all, politics breed destruction, how can we find peace in our place in a mechanized world, what motivates our self-destruction? Often the storytelling grows from the events and images as much as the words spoken. The touching sensitivity expressed between the most unlikely of lovers is traced with such gentle, resonant and evocative strokes that live action, I believe, could not have found such breadth of effect.

Introspective and thoughtful, deliberately paced and stylistically told, Jin-Roh will inevitably, regretfully reach a tiny audience, existing in the obscure universe of anime, Those who do experience its extraordinary power can consider themselves fortunate.

BRADY FIECHTER



THE FATE OF DESTRUCTION IS ALSO THE JOY OF REBIRTH

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

DEATH & REBIRTH

THE END OF EVANGELION



The masterful conclusion to the epic EVA series will finally be unveiled in two stunning new anime features. Manga Entertainment proudly presents the most highly anticipated anime releases of 2002.

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

DEATH AND REBIRTH & THE END OF EVANGELION

COMING THIS SUMMER

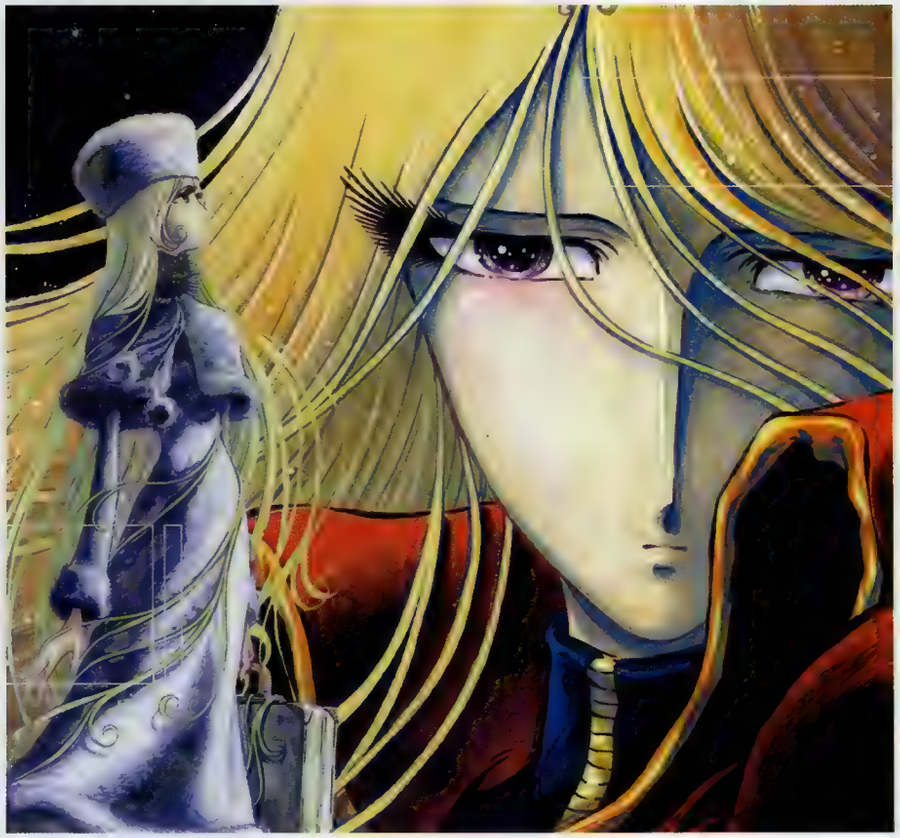
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MANGA VIDEO

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MAETEL LEGEND

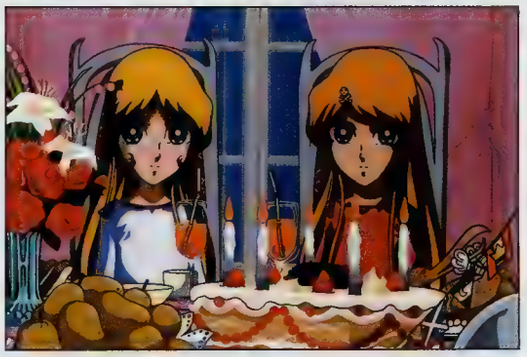
Central Park Media • unrated • 85 minutes play rating ●●○○○



La Maetel, the once beautiful planet that Emeraldas and her sister Maetel call home, has been forced out of its orbit by the planet Ra and cast into the freezing dark abyss of deep space. Their only hope for survival, or so we're meant to believe, is through forced mechanization—the melding of their human bodies with machine parts. Mechanization surgery is administered by the planet's resident robo-megalomaniac, Hard Gear. It comes as absolutely no surprise when we learn that his goal is to mechanize the entire planet and reign supreme. After witnessing their mother's gruesome metamorphosis (in which she seems to grow taillights all over her body), Maetel and Emeraldas decide it's flesh or death. The oil and human blood robo-diet (and I thought Atkins was bad) is not sounding tasty.

I've always been curious about where Emeraldas hailed from, where she got her strong conviction and solemn demeanor, and I suppose Maetel is interesting too, being the sister who inherited kindness and inner strength. But there are just too many holes in Leiji Matsumoto's telling of the story for me to buy it. Especially since I love everything else about this franchise. As their mother the Queen's, mind and body are consumed by the mechanization, she begins to turn on her lovely daughters, until with her last ounce of humanity she beckons them to catch the 999–Galaxy Express 999–and make for Earth. My question is, if there was no other way and she knew the 999 was coming, why didn't she just catch it too, and search the galaxy for a new home for her people? This is not a smart queen. And who created Hard Gear? I'd have yanked his distributor cap the minute he opened his mouth. The guy has all the charisma of a circus clown. Adding insult to injury, Hard Gear's robo army fire lasers at these girls from point blank range every time they see them, and they never even come close. And still worse: If the surgery causes machine parts to slowly absorb the human body, then where are all the whole corpses they're dumping coming from? And how come the rats gnawing there bones are doing so well? Do they have space heaters? I'd watch just about anything to admire Matsumoto's character designs and flamboyant bit players, but Maetel Legend is a stretch.

DAVE HALVERSON









You're not going to read this are you?

You're just going to stare at the picture of Tita and Mei Lin, the smokin' hot stars of ADV FILMS' new PLASTIC LITTLE DVD. I could write whatever I wanted here and you wouldn't even notice. Like purple monkey bean paste underwear. Or flying couch dribble sweat blues. You wouldn't know the difference.

But in the off chance someone is actually reading this, I should mention PLASTIC LITTLE is a fun, action-packed anime you won't have to think too hard about to enjoy, filled to the brim with all sorts of sexy ladies like these two. And, for the first time ever, PLASTIC LITTLE comes with a specially designed **JIGGLE COUNTER** option, which counts how many times... well, you can figure it out.

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ADV FILMS

IN DEATH NEW LIFE...



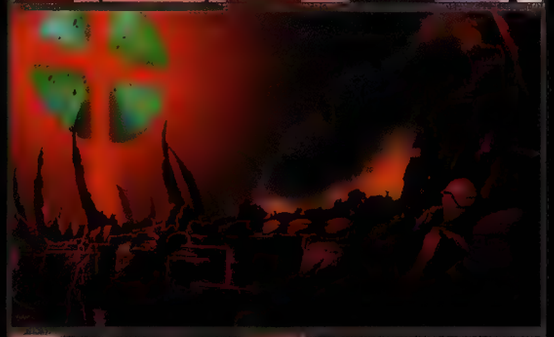
In death Kyosuke discovers a new life,
and in a flicker he becomes...

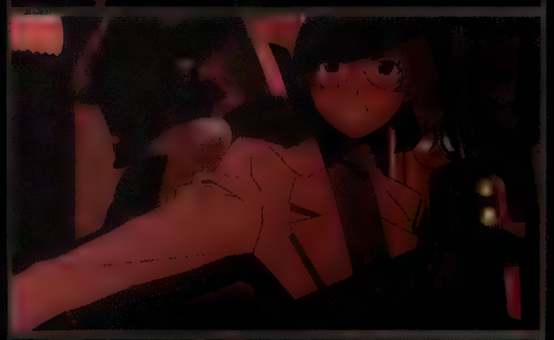
The SoulTaker

Pioneer Entertainment • 16 & up • 75 minutes

play rating

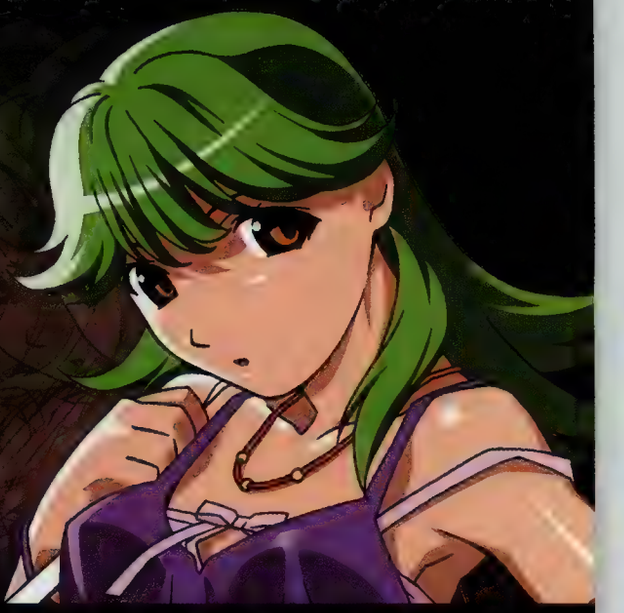












Drenched in religious symbolism and metaphysical undercurrents, Soultaker is the freshest anime series you'll likely ever see. A departure in every way from the norm–comparable only to the recent Revolutionary Girl Utena Movie–-Soultaker plunges into it's surreal depths the moment it begins and holds you in a death grip every second it's on the screen.

Slain by his dying mother, whom I believe was a nun, Kyosuke is risen again with the help of Mio Masake, when she has a premonition that he may be buried alive. But Kyosuke has obviously not awakened in the human world, but rather, a parallel dimension hidden somewhere behind the thin veil of reality.

When Mio mysteriously disappears, his predicament begins to come into focus. Mio is a Flicker; a soul fragment from the twin sister, Runa, he never knew he had. Now, in death he seems destined to protect pieces of her soul which manifest themselves as cute girls–with perfect bodies. God I love anime.

Who he is protecting them from turns out to be just as compelling as why. Kirihara Heavy Industries and the Hospital Mutants are both after Runa, and the quickest way to her is by capturing, torturing, and if need be dissecting flickers. Hospital mutants I won't even attempt to describe except to say that they redefine wicked. And the Kirihara are a group of powerful omnipotent killing machines run by...a cute girl...with a perfect body, who loves coffee! How's a recently deceased young man supposed battle such evil forces? That's where the Soultaker comes in. Get him angry enough and the 80's metal wails as Kyosuke becomes the Soultaker in true gothic super hero form. The contrast is so completely absurd that it works almost too well. We need to get this guy and Spawn together.

If what I'm describing sounds completely unfathomable, that's because Soultaker defies explanation. How can something that revolves around so much death breathe so much life into its audience? Simple: through a casket-load of ingenious new animation techniques. The camera pans and cuts like Oliver Stone after 10 double lattes, leaving an on imprint on your mind. Grayscales mix with bright reds and greens, the backgrounds seem to stretch and pulse, haunting still images invade smooth animation sequences, and stained glass scrolls behind moving silhouettes. This is high art, baby. If Soultaker hailed from America, it would be 100 times the sensation that it will inevitably be. But hey, you know all about it now, so indulge yourself in one of 2002's first anime masterpieces.



anime capsule reviews



adpolice . strangedawn . gundam08thmsteam

AD Police episodes 1-12



ADV FILMS • 12 & UP
300 MINS

'When boomers spin out of control and posses construction equipment who you gonna call?'

play rating

Voodoo-Organic–Metal–Extension–Resource: Voomers. After the Great Earthquake, the Genom corporation created voomers to aid in the daunting task of rebuilding Tokyo into the shiny megalopolis of Genom City. Voomers became a part of everyday life–like Cartman's Super Trapper Keeper 2000 before it ate him and Rosie O'Donnell. But when they spin out of control, grow tentacles and posses construction equipment, who you gonna call? Well, if it was 2040, you'd call the Knight Sabers, but it's 2020, so you'll have to make due with the AD Police. Think Lethal Weapon meets Miami Vice. The story revolves around Sasaki Kenji, a maverick cop (he's Riggs without the dead wife), and he's coming to grips with being a team player and his new partner, Hans since everyone else he's worked with is either dead or close to it. The somewhat cliché police-room drama is broken up by Genom's attempt at deception through an experimental biologically fused boomer (they get the B when they go rogue) named Fletcher, and by playing poor Hans like a harp from hell. For a 12-episode show (with as many animation directors; no two look exactly alike), there's not a lot of character development, but a couple of twists and turns keep it interesting–and Genom City is always fun. The transfer's a bit grainy, the animation is sparse and the backgrounds are rushed, but AD Police is passable anime for diehard fans of the strain, thanks to the character designs and evil corporate undertones.

DAVE HALVERSON

Strange Dawn



Lil' Vision • most audiences
92 MINS

'an alien world full of nasty, armed, and distinctly peculiar little people'

play rating

One minute you're walking your normal beat home from school, chit-chatting with your best friend, and the next you're in an alien world full of nasty, armed, and distinctly peculiar little people. In Strange Dawn, Urban Vision's first release under their new Lil' Visions label (kinder, gentler anime?), we're granted access to just such an occurrence. No sooner then Emi and Yuki realize they're not in Kansas anymore, they're marched in front of the Belzago Village elders where they learn that their arrival was foretold. The villagers and their brave pint- sized warriors, caught within a vicious power struggle, -are convinced that Emi and Yuki have been sent to protect them. What do they know of school garb?

Unfortunatley for the them, even though the girls tower over the population like a couple of queen Kongs, Yuko is having none of it. There's no Loo (British for potty), and she's not fond of being considered a savior when she knows (or thinks she knows) she's really not.

Set in a charming fantasy world littered with wonderfully creative characters and costumes, Strange Dawn is a handsomely drawn and colored anime with excellent detail, just the right amount of computer-generated scenery, and a surprisingly engaging soundtrack. As the story pushes on, the world becomes increasingly more enchanting, as does the plight of the Belzago and the many different characters we meet along the way. I wouldn't recommend it for children under 10, though. For little people, the Belgazo and the Grianian's have big tempers and fancy their blades a little too much for little kids.

DAVE HALVERSON

MS Gundam The 08th MS Team vol.4

Bandai • 13 & UP
90 MINS

'When the smoke clears, and there's alot of it, the series culminates taking an entirley new direction'

play rating

For my money, the pinnacle of the Gundam family, Mobile Suit Gundam The 08th MS Team, is coming to a poetic close. The struggle that began in deep space has boiled down to a standoff on Earth, and the Zeon forces have been pinned down by the Federation in Southeast Asia. But the Zeon's super weapon, the Apsalus, is finally ready, and they intend on evacuating their wounded and fleeing their mountain base. Threatened with the Zeon's awesome super weapon, The Federation agrees to a temporary cease-fire, and it seems diplomacy may win the day. But Gineas has other ideas, and a catch-22 of biblical proportions develops. Caught in the middle, Shiro and Aina's forbidden love is in full bloom and they've reached the conclusion that being together is all that really matters (deep stuff where anime is concerned). Sensing that Shiro could possibly desert, the Federation has counter intelligence in place, and Shiro's rag-tag band of misfits, now fused as one, will have to make the toughest decisions of their lives. The MS 08th, for the first time, are split. .

This is about as good as wartime anime gets. Woven into the series finale, we get one last pilot's eye view of Gundams in action as the team takes on the nastiest Zeke of all, Packard. He's sworn his allegiance to Aina and chosen this as his final battle. When the smoke clears, and there's a lot of it, the series culminates taking an entirely new direction with 30 unforgettable minutes that leave you wanting more.

DAVE HALVERSON




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Battle of the Planets

Rhino • all ages
100 minutes

'Let me tell you, these suckers are priced right and packed to the gills with extras'

play rating

7-Zark-7 wants you to buy this DVD (and so do I)! Rhino Entertainment has brought back Battle of the Planets in full DVD glory (it's also available in VHS for those of you still waiting to see if CDs are going to break wide). Let me tell you, these suckers are priced right and packed to the gills with extras, which is no mean feat considering the source material is nearly 30 years old!

The series was originally released by Japan's Tatsunoko Productions in 1972 as Science Ninja Team Gatchaman. In 1978, at a cost of nearly five million dollars, Sandy Frank Productions acquired the rights to Gatchaman and proceeded to tailor it to American audiences. Repackaged and dubbed, along with new footage, the series was called Battle of the Planets. Set in the year 2003, it tells the story of G-Force: a team of five physically enhanced teenagers: Mark, Jason, Keyop, Tiny and Princess. Aided by their faithful yet prideful robot assistant 7-Zark-7, and armed with unique abilities, weapons and special vehicles, including the über cool Fiery Phoenix, they battled the evil forces of Galactor.

1986 saw Gatchaman repackaged once again by the Turner Network as G-Force. Minus the new footage created for BOTP, G-Force was actually more faithful to the original, but it was hindered by the super-silly renaming of the key characters. Mark became Ace Goodheart and Jason was now Dirk Daring. The other characters faired slightly better, but the damage was done and Turner's G-Force failed to win much popularity.



Priced at $19.95 ($9.95 VHS), each DVD features 2 episodes of Battle of the Planets, 2 episodes from Gatchaman plus a bonus G-Force episode, as well as 5.1 audio and animated menus. The Gatchaman episodes are in Japanese with English subtitle option. Each DVD is approximately 100 minutes. Volumes 1 and 2 are available now. Volumes 3 and 4 are expected sometime in early 2002. So get out there and TRANSMUTE!

MIKE EISENBERG

Power Stone vol. 2



ADV FILMS • 12 & UP
100 MINS

'Falcon gets duped by his own mother and ends up on the blind date from hell'

play rating

For some reason, the second installment of Power Stone didn't bug me nearly as much as the first. Maybe it's because I've accepted the fact that Capcom's beautiful characters will live out their anime lives barely animated, so now I can focus on the silly plots and how much I enjoy these characters in the first place–especially Rouge. Besides, things are getting interesting, and somewhat comical. This time out, Falcon gets duped by his own mother and ends up on the blind date from hell with a two-faced lass named Cassie. The date ends with Falcon fighting a band of cross-dressing ninja pirates and a giant robot! You can never go wrong with a combo like that. Next, a new stone ushers in a new ally as Wang Tang joins Falcon in his search for dear old dad and more 411 on the mysterious stones. Things come to a close with a giant octopus fight and a power-stone packin' pirate named Kraken. They of course smoke Kraken and the octopus…well, they cook the octopus.

DAVE HALVERSON

Sorcerer on the Rocks



ADV FILMS • 15 & UP
60 MINS

'If you love Bastard's attitude when he's really a bastard–you're really going to love Shiba Scotch'

play rating

If you like Bastard's attitude–when he's really a bastard–you're really going to love Shiba Scotch, the single most abusive, womanizing, devil-may-care, arrogant a-hole to ever grace an anime. This guy makes even the most barbarous bounty hunters look like choir boys. In his employ, he is served by Kiss, a cute, bubbly and somewhat horny she-devil; Genmi, an outwardly gay yet omnipotent warrior; and (when it suits her) Million Dollar, who's greed is only out- measured by Shiba's disregard for anyone other then himself. In a nutshell this is the beginning of a beautiful series. Sister Gin Fizz is actually a chronic do-gooder, along for the ride with the express purpose of "saving" Shiba. She's convinced he has a good side buried within him somewhere, even though when he loses his Earthly body he gladly slips into hers and takes it on the ride of its life. In the first episodes, we get a pair of spooky twins from The Shining school of etiquette— two massive demons, a pair of boob grabs, and enough questionable behavior to last us until Shiba and company's next twisted adventure.

DAVE HALVERSON

"A HANDSOME, WELL-EXECUTED FILM."
NEW YORK TIMES

"...WORTH THE STATESIDE ANTICIPATION... BEAUTIFUL, WITTY AND PROVOCATIVE."
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

"A VISUAL POETRY THAT'S REFRESHING."
VARIETY

"A GORGEOUSLY ANIMATED SURREALIST ADVENTURE."
CHICAGO READER



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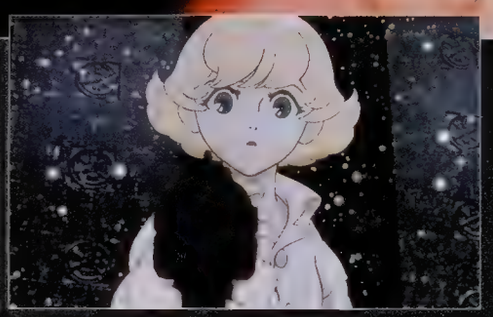
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URBAN VISION

Metropolis

Columbia/Tri-Star • 107 minutes









Metropolis is an event among animated films, reaching beyond the stigma of 'anime' to instant classic

feature by **jon m gibson**

What appears on screen, from the moment it fades from black, is a thing of beauty. *Metropolis* caters to the entire population of animation fans—not just Japanese anime, but animated movies as a whole—by way of grandeur. The city—a futuristic incarnation of commercial architecture, soaring high into the heavens as a symbol of progress—is dense with spectacle. The layers of the downtown dwelling, rooted deep underground, are massive and labyrinthine. And the animation, even though it is not giant-like, is grand on a scale all its own.

But the story is not familiar in any sense. *Metropolis* is a wild elaboration of Fritz Lang's 1926 black-and-white film of the same name; and it isn't completely true to Osamu Tezuka's manga either. Early in the film, we lock focus on an elderly detective and his nephew, Kenichi, as they explore the mystery of the Ziggurat (the massive metropolitan skyscraper). Quickly, Duke Red's scheme to extort control from city officials is revealed—and his catalyst is the half-girl, half-human, Tima, modeled after his deceased daughter. An elaborate throne is prepared, wired with giant computer chips and sensors, in an effort to possess the city with a merger of power (the human brain and the computer mainframe).

Duke Red's adopted son, on the other hand, despises the plan—mostly out of jealously—and spends a majority of the film stalking Tima with only one goal at hand: to murder her. With the help of Kenichi, Tima evades capture; but the situation isn't just a cat-and-mouse chase. She's also dealing with a theme similar to Spielberg's *A.I.*—but with a more provocative twist, since the debate regarding a machine's ability to love is cast between her two souls (her mechanical half and her human side).

Toss in very Western touches—like the opening shot of the city scored with samples from Dixieland; and the heart-wrenching climax played against Ray Charles' "I Can't Stop Loving You"—and it's easy to see that *Metropolis* isn't traditional anime by any means.

At surface level, the film is as awe-inspiring as the first time *Star Wars* or *Blade Runner* (the look is that distinctive—that impacting). At its core, the film stocks emotion and overflowing passion.

But why analyze the artistry when you can chat with the artists? Renowned anime director, Rintaro, and screenwriter Katsuhiro Otomo discess *Metropolis* in greater depth on the pages that follow. Indulge.

rintaro talks



Metropolis has aged 50 years since its inception. What were the challenges in animating such an old manga?
The challenge was deciding the best way to bring the sense of nostalgia with 21st century sensitivity to the screen and recreate Tezuka's original motifs and essence faithfully. Our intention was to create a brand new visual style of animation that no one has ever seen before. So, from character development to art design, we had a lot of discussions among our staff throughout this project. That is a difficult process, but also an enjoyable part of my work.

Osamu Tezuka's drawing style is very rare to see in anime. From your experience, was it difficult for audiences to embrace?
I don't think so. I think it's all up to each individual taste. There are a lot of Tezuka fans in Japan who love his manga characters. Because Tezuka's characters are not well known among the younger generation, it appeals to them vividly.

The film takes many poetic liberties, veering away from Tezuka's original story. What motivated you and Katsuhiro Otomo to change the plot?
Mr. Otomo and I were trying to create an animation film that was faithful to Tezuka's original essence with updated sensitivity. Developing this project as a feature film, we envisioned this to be a gigantic sci-fi fantasy animation film by adding new elements. For example, we brought Tezuka characters in from other Manga, like ROCK, HAM EGG, SKUNK and also created new locations like "Upper-Ground World" and "Under-Ground World." From the title _Metropolis_, the city is a very important element in this film; so the story had to unfold as the city as the core of the story. The script had to contain the elements that were sufficiently spectacular.

What incited the use of Dixieland jazz for the soundtrack? What do you think that style of music offers to the story of _Metropolis_?
I had an image of New York City in the 1940's (the era called "Machine Age"), so jazz popped into my head, naturally. I believe jazz originated in New Orleans. When I work on each project, I think that it is necessary to create a new tool for leading the audience to an unknown world. When it comes to choosing the music score for my film, my considerations are not to utilize a conventional animation film score, but instead use the best music that is able to express the world that I create.

The use of Ray Charles' classic, "I Can't Stop Loving You," is particularly emotional. Why did you choose that song for the climax of the film?
First of all, that is one of favorite songs. Secondly, the lyrics fit perfectly. 'Tima' cannot stop loving…' / 'We are both human and robots cannot stop loving…' / 'We can not stop loving the animation…'. I was convinced that this was the best song to express the theme of this film, which was the greatness of 'Renaissance' from 'Destruction.'

Tezuka enjoyed drawing massive crowds and extreme detail in most of his manga. In animation, isn't it difficult to incorporate so many intricate details and move them frame by frame?
That's exactly right!! The crowd scene is the most difficult part in creating animation, which we would love to avoid. Despite the difficulties, we challenged ourselves in the opening sequence. It must have been quite exhausting for animators, because it took us 5 months to complete the 3-second scene. I bet they were dying to get out of the production.

The CG work in _Metropolis_ is amazing? Did you find it taxing to blend traditional, hand-drawn animation with the advanced graphics power of computers?
It was a very difficult task. However, that was the whole point of making this film so we could not work around it. The finished film was the most beautiful visual achievement, because of all my staff's hard work and effort.

How long was the production process, from start to finish, for _Metropolis_? From the level of detail in the story and animation, it appears like you've worked on it for decades. Did you have a large staff of animators?
From the point of writing the script, it took us 6 years to complete. In the last part of the touch up process (about a year-and-a-half), we doubled the number of staff in the digital department. I do not know the final number of people who worked on this project.

Many directors complain that it is difficult to work within a given budget, saying that they usually have to limit themselves on what they can actually do. What was your budget for Metropolis and what limitations did you meet because of it?
I always try to keep the budget in mind when I work on any project, but it is a very challenging task. In the case of Metropolis, we could not estimate the budget for the digital process, which was our major problem. We had no choice but to finish this film, so we tried our best to keep the schedule on time and within our budget. After all, in the end, it was the director's responsibility to somehow coordinate the budget and complete the film. There was no restriction on this project other than to complete the film by opening day.

You use color filters to great effect in the film. What do you think BLUE and RED represent? Also, please discuss in greater detail some other symbolism you've put into the _Metropolis_.
I was not planning to make a reality film. Therefore, the art director and I came up with the idea to use the color coordination that represented FUN. From the beginning to end, we purposely avoided the typical gaudy animation colors and emphasized retrospective colors.

How does _Metropolis_ compare to your other highly regarded works like _X_ and _Adieu Galaxy Express 999_? Do you have a favorite?
My compilation is _Metropolis_. I cannot pick a favorite, as they are all close to my heart.

Astro Boy was originally conceived as a product of 2003. How close do you think we are to building a working robot (not necessarily on that can fly, though)?
Considering the direction that technology is moving with Sony's AIBO, I think it will arrive in about 4-5 years. However, I cannot support my theory.

Kima is very different from the robot Tezuka wrote about in his vision of _Metropolis_ (Micchi). Can you discuss the changes you made and why?
First of all, the idea for the name was taken from Mesopotamian civilization, including the names like 'JIGRAT' and 'MALDOUGH.' In Tezuka's original, 'MITCHY' was a unisex character; however, in our film, we made the character a girl in order to make the story simple and to create a love story between her and Kenichi.

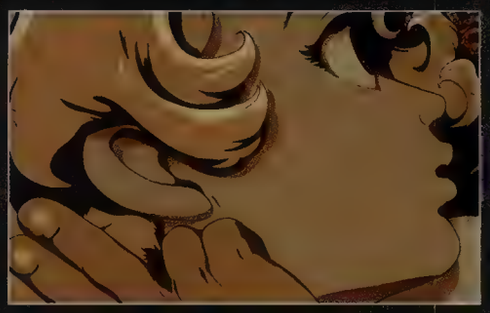
Many Americans are still shocked by the violence in Japanese anime. What is your reaction? Do you think American cartoons are too cautious and mellow?
I don't glorify the violence in any way, but I think it is acceptable as long as you have a solid theme for the story. However, we should avoid irresponsible, violent scenes. On the other hand, out of the parents' concern, to shut our children out completely from it might also have an unhealthy effect on them.

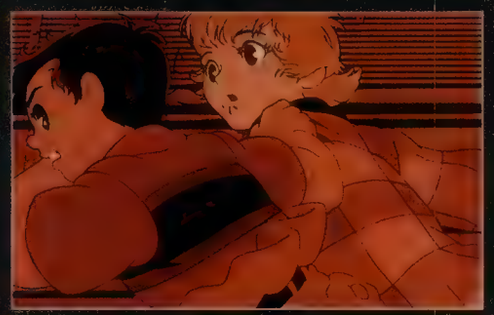
What is your vision for the future of animation? Where do you think anime will stand 10 years from now?
I have no idea. I wish to see more animation films with a new visual expression, because the world of animation is quite broad. Of course, it won't happen without all the support from our animation fans.

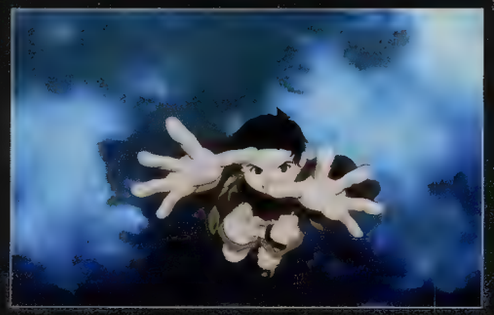


Comic book writers, in general, don't go outside much. I felt that it might be fun going to out to work in the studio...

// interview with katsuhiro otomo







How did you become involved with *Metropolis*?
I really liked Tezuka's drawings from *Metropolis.* Since there is such a large collection of his manga work, it is very hard for me to guess which one was closest to Tezuka's true essence. Is it *Tetsuwan Atom* or *Hi No Tori*? I could not see the point of remaking those well-known titles now—so I took the writing job for *Metropolis.*

In what ways did the participation of Rintaro influence your decision to work on it?
Tezuka's works have been made into animation for a long time. I don't mean to object to that, but I felt the need to make Tezuka's animations much closer to his essence and pure, original forms. During a conversation I had with Rintaro, he mentioned, 'Me too... I've been thinking about working on the project based on Tezuka's earlier works. If I decided to do it, would you write the script for me?'

You first worked with Rintaro on *Harmagedon* in 1983. What sparked your transition from manga to film?
When I started drawing *Akira,* I had a few assistants helping me. But before then, I was pretty much working by myself. Comic book writers, in general, don't go outside much. I felt that it might be fun going out to work in the studio with a bunch of staff drawing for the same project.

What influences did you incorporate into the Metropolis script?
I went through all of the architectural design book, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (about Manhattan, New York), that the director had in order to get the feeling of the world I was going to create. So I would say that there are quite a bit of influences from the book that have gone into Metropolis. I'll tell you the truth: I did check some of the designs from that book when I was working on *Akira.*

What elements from Osamu Tezuka's original story did you decide to preserve and what did you decide needed updating?
It's pretty much faithful to Tezuka's original. We weren't trying to change the theme nor add anything new at all. It was a pretty easy process writing this script without taking up too much time. We hardly struggled to get this done. I had a meeting with Rintaro at his summerhouse in Yatsugatake and it was pretty much done at that time. I remembered seeing the beautiful view of autumn tints. All the names, including the main title *Metropolis,* the high-rise building, 'Jigradd' (the symbol of the futuristic city), and Duke Red's political party, Maldouck, came from the Mesopotamian civilization. Besides the name of main character, Kenichi, I felt that one of Tezuka's original character's names, Mitchy, did not really fit in with the rest of the names and felt dated. I changed it to Tima, which I also took from a Mesopotamian princess's name. In Tezuka's original, this character was portrayed obscurely as a boy. Since there are no female characters in the film at all, I felt that it ought to be a girl.

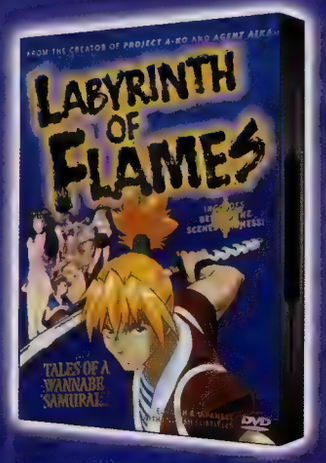
What are your favorite parts of the script?
While I was writing the script, I always had this idea of having the character of Rock (who was not in Tezuka's original) appear in this film. If you read the collections of Teazuka's work, you know that Rock is an awesome character. I know it's kind of a 'no-no,' but every time I read Tezuka's manga, I sense the presence of Rock. Also, I had a wish to have all Tezuka's characters in one film from the beginning of this project.

Speaking of Tezuka, what works of his do you admire most?
My first favorite of Tezuka's work was *Tetsuwan Atom;* and I also I like *Big X.* When I was in high school, I read *Hi No Tori.* As you know, there is large collection of Tezuka's work available, so it is hard for me to pin down just one as my influence. I was a faithful viewer of *Tetsuwan Atom,* the TV show, too. It was very intense for me, so I was always at home right on time for the airing of this show.

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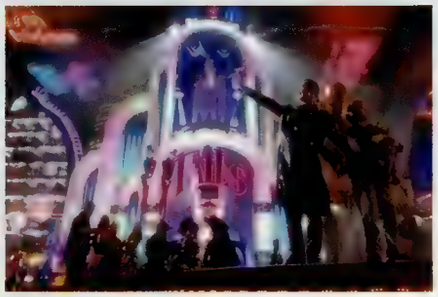
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A.I



DREAMWORKS
RATED PG-13

PLAY: Contrary to nearly *every* mainstream magazine, newspaper, website and TV show—the negative stance was resounding—*A.I.* is not a bad movie. In fact, *A.I.* is an infinitely great film, soaked to the brim with amazing imagery, stellar performances, intricate symbolism, soaring emotion, production designs to die for, and the little screw that ties it all together—Steven Spielberg. Such a director needs no introduction—it's appropriate to gush, even though he was involved in that *Flintstones* tragedy—as he's managed to create a futuristic empire in *A.I.* with the aid of an indelibly ripe concept. The tale of 11-year-old David (brought to mechanical realism by Haley Joel Osment) is the film's focus, chronicling his desperate adventures through a world that doesn't quite accept his uniqueness. He is artificial, through and through. His guts are a fusion of steel and latches; his brain is an advanced microchip. David's architecture is impeccable. He can move, think, talk, smell and touch just like any human—oftentimes, even better. But he can't grasp the concept of love like real boys. Thus begins a remixed version of *Pinocchio*—a neon-lit, flying car, sex bot re-envisioning—in which young David searches for the "Blue Fairy" so he can wish his way to a flesh-and-blood existence. Now, the only substantial debate worth addressing about *A.I.* is the moment David begins his quest. The film was originally conceived by the late Stanley Kubrick, but before his death, the concept was confided to his good friend Spielberg over many long dinner meetings and *many* glasses of wine. Odd, though, because each filmmaker is on an opposite end of the pole. So there is that blatant separation between a few key sequences—an often edgy balance—in which you can easily recognize whether it was from Spielberg's



mind or Kubrick's notes.

VALUE: I've been an advocate of commentaries since the inception of DVD. That alternate audio track, as basic as it may seem, is a great resource for any film buff. But Spielberg has yet to concede—he just won't sit down in a recording studio. Rumor has it that the legendary director believes films are best left alone; why taint them with "making-of" banter? Frankly, it's entertaining to analyze a great movie (and sometimes even more fun to listen to commentaries about Hollywood's most putrid outings). Never, though, has Dreamworks left enthusiasts in the dust. Here they provide a supplementary DVD chock full of featurettes like "Acting *A.I.*," "Designing *A.I.*," "Lighting *A.I.*"—you get the picture. There's plenty of in-depth analysis and tidbits included (i.e. notice that Osment doesn't blink once during the entire movie). Not a complete package, but an inspirational one.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●●
dvd ●●●●◐

RAT RACE



PARAMOUNT
RATED PG-13

PLAY: When *Rat Race* marched into theaters, it wasn't exactly greeted with open arms. Critics slammed it. But now the truth must be told: This Jerry Zucker project is a zany masterpiece. At points, as the film glides along at a perfectly ripe pace, it inspires laughter of Monty Python caliber—the kind of endless chuckles that come along once every decade. To think, it's all inspired by a simple plot device: Eight desperate tourists start in Vegas to chase a $2 million duffel bag hidden in a New Mexico train station. Rowan Atkinson (of *Mr. Bean* fame) leads the ensemble as a witty Italian; and John Cleese is deliriously divine as the casino tycoon that fuels the quest for cash.

VALUE: Turn no further than "Jerry and Andy Call the Actors," an extra that defies the rules of the audio commentary. After realizing their own comments were sleep inducing, the director/writer duo decided to call each cast member on their private lines. They catch Cuba Gooding, Jr. as he jumps into the shower; and Jon Lovitz literally hangs up on them. Even the deleted scenes are worth a peak. *Rat Race* is spot-on comedy—meticulously harmonized lunacy at its finest.

JON M GIBSON

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SIXTH SENSE SE



BUENA VISTA
RATED PG-13

PLAY: The essence of Hitchcock is in all of M. Night Shyamalan's films (okay, there's only been two—*Unbreakable* and *The Sixth Sense*—but it's easy to spot, and there's more to come, I'm sure). But this is his freshman effort—the film that quickly became synonymous with "I see dead people"—that's been released yet again. This time, however, it falls under the "Vista Series" label, an innovative new line of "special editions"—only Disney-fied (they brand everything, folks—"It's not just DVD. It's *Disney* DVD"). Everyone has seen *Sixth Sense*, yet it's always a treat to revisit this most provocative of thrillers.

VALUE: Try these supplements on for size: "Reflections from the Set," a cast and crew testimonial on the making this mainstream breakthrough; "Between Two Worlds" concerning many true-to-life paranormal run-ins; and "Moving Pictures: The Storyboard Process," which is self-explanatory. So it's a little beefier than the DVD edition released in 2000—but at least this "special edition" was packaged with style in mind (a slipcase). A nifty storyboard insert—stowed in a frosted envelope—tops off the two-disc set.

JON M GIBSON

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NEWSBYTES

. . . Harrison Ford will pick up the whip one more time. **Steven Spielberg has confirmed that he will begin production on the fourth installment in the *Indiana Jones* franchise** as soon as he finishes up production on *Catch Me if You Can* with Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hanks . . . **"Yeah, baby!"** New Line recently refused to plea bargain with MGM over the title of their latest secret agent spoof, *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (**MGM alleges that**

BONES



NEW LINE
RATED R

PLAY: Generally, when Snoop Dogg has a starring role, it's in a direct-to-cable gangsta fest—bullets fly, women talk trash, and ghetto slang is tossed about randomly ("Ho, don't be josslin' my nephew"). In *Bones*, however, the rapper/actor wanders onto the silver screen, decked out in an array of stylish '70s suits and pimped-out mink coats. He plays the local kingpin—an inner-city don, of sorts—during an era more than 30 years past. Zoom to modern day when a bunch of bumbling twenty-somethings decide to turn the haunted abode of Mr. Bones (Snoop) into a pumping night club (and they even adopt the drooling, snapping, rabies-infested dog that was running around his crib—it seemed like a good idea at the time). Their plans are hindered, though, by the vengeful spirit that haunts the house.

VALUE: Even though *Bones* disappeared from theaters faster than logic from the film's plot, New Line proves, once again, that they are committed to fan service. They've loaded this disc with a few hours of, well, anything they could get their hands on (a production commentary, miscellaneous "making-of" nonsense, a trailer). On Halloween, maybe.

JON M GIBSON

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ATLANTIS CE



DISNEY
RATED PG

PLAY: The most obvious saving grace of this Disney animated feature is the surprising absence of cheesy sing-alongs. There are no "It's a Whole New World" or "Be My Guest" bursts of song—*Atlantis* is a film solely focused on one goal: spectacle. The animation is rich, the action is pumping, and the characters are extremely likeable (Michael J. Fox fuses the film's lead, Milo, with extraordinary personality). *Atlantis* is a Disney film like no other—it will hopefully leave fans in awe and attract a new generation of enthusiasts.

VALUE: This is a "collector's edition" that won't disappoint animation fans—anywhere. Since production on *Atlantis* began immediately after the popular inception of the DVD format, Disney was able to archive a slew of "making-of" extras. You'll be treated to inside peaks of the drawing-board process and intriguing tidbits regarding the history of a "real-life" Atlantian kingdom. Most interesting, though, is an alternative approach to the audio commentary. Throughout the film, the production team cuts in with "visual" facts and highlights (they're actually quite humorous). Your education in the art of animation begins here.

JON M GIBSON

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SOUL SURVIVORS



ARTISAN
RATED R

PLAY: Heed the first warning on this horror genre tragedy: "More blood, more sex, more terror than the theatrical release." Yes, that's the formula that Artisan has adopted to market this "Killer Cut" version of a big screen flop (one that was so terrible, it was carelessly bumped down the release calendar for over a year). *Soul Survivors* is full of cliches, ludicrous plot crutches, sexual pop that barely delivers, and acting that begs Pauly Shore to start making movies again. And most disturbing—aside from the unprofessional visuals that resemble a TNN "Movie of the Week"—is a forced ending that defies all logic. Really, though, it's no surprise that this teen murder thriller is an unforgivable disaster—because, well, it's a teen murder thriller.

VALUE: From the very start, this piece of cinematic piss seems cheap—yet, the DVD makes no reservations. There is a surprising amount of supplements to distract consumers who fall into the trap. An audio commentary with lead Melissa Sagemiller and some deleted scenes are the headlining features. Plus, it's wrapped in a shiny, holographic cover for collectors. A perfectly bloody mess—period.

JON M GIBSON

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BUCKAROO BANZAI



MGM
RATED PG

PLAY: After nearly 20 years of obscure cult fame, Buckaroo Banzai and his Ford Duelly Jet Car race forth onto TV screens everywhere. Peter Weller (*Robocop*) stars as Buckaroo, a brilliant American/Japanese jet-car-driving, neurosurgeon, rock 'n roll scientist. BB breaks the dimension barrier with the help of his newly invented Oscillation Overthruster. Upon returning, Buckaroo's immediately contacted by the alien Black Lectroids (who, for no explained reason, all appear as Rastafarians). They inform BB that his old nemesis, the evil Dr. Emilio Lizardo (John Lithgow), is back and in league with the evil Red Lectroids from Planet 10. Led by Christopher Lloyd, who appears to be channeling Reverend Jim's evil twin brother, they plan to steal the Overthruster and use it to escape their Earthbound exile. Buckaroo, aided by his unlikely team of heroes, must stop them—or the Earth is toast.

VALUE: Someone was in the know regarding fan expectations for this long awaited release. Deleted scenes, a "making-of" featurette, the teaser trailer, director/screenwriter commentaries, and other odds and ends are here.

MICHAEL EISENBERG

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PRIME GIG



NEW LINE
RATED R

PLAY: This Vince Vaughn vehicle barely gained momentum during its theatrical run—a few theaters in LA and NY ran it for only a matter of weeks. But it's intriguing for a few crucial reasons. One: It stars an excited Vaughn as a Grade A telemarketer (a character with the same, if not more, energy as his presence in *Swingers*). Two: It's a behind-the-scenes look at the swindling madness of the telemarketing industry (trust me, it's intriguing in a variety of ways). *The Prime Gig* is an actor's movie—a side project for big name stars (Ed Harris, Julia Ormond, etc.) that resulted in extremely low salaries (à la *Ocean's 11*). But it's a gratifying finished product, even if the film is flawed in pacing and overridden with a tad too much compassion. Hell, it's a movie about scams—the art of scamming and the consequences of the scammer—point and sealed.

VALUE: There's absolutely nothing here for the few shoppers that are brave enough to take a chance with this indie. A somewhat edgy animated menu is hardly "special" (but I wouldn't expect much for an underdog like *Gig*). Think *Used Cars*, only on the telephone. It's slick.

JON M GIBSON

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it pokes fun at the James Bond film, *Goldfinger*—nah, really?). MGM offered, to no avail, to drop suit if New Line agreed to push back the release of the Denzel Washington drama, *John Q* (MGM's *Hart's War* was pitted against the film during the same weekend) . . . In an effort to mangle his "big" movie reputation (*Pearl Harbor*, *Armageddon*, *The Rock*), **Michael Bay is resorting to violence**. His Platinum Dunes production company is currently working on a remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; and Bay is attached to direct . . . **After nine seasons, *The X-Files* is finally closing shop** and David Duchovny may return for the two-part finale, says series creator, Chris Carter. Along with the possible cameo by Fox Mulder, Carter has confirmed that **several alien and government conspiracies will finally be resolved** come May. Another stand-alone *X-Files* movie is currently under development . . . Since it's theatrical release, illegal **digitized versions of *The Lord of the Rings* have been downloaded more than 160,000 times per month**. The largest culprit: college dormitories . . . No one lives forever—except James Bond, that is. **Pierce Brosnan has agreed to star in at least one more Bond film** as the ultra-suave secret agent, bringing the franchise to an unprecedented 21 films . . . UC Berkeley's school newspaper, *The Daily Cal*, reported that ***The Incredible Hulk* movie is set to beginning filming in-and-around the campus' science labs this Spring** if a deal can be ironed out between administrators and Hollywood . . .



BODY ELECTRIC

Artificial intelligence offers many prospects for the future of humanity—including cyborgism

an essay by **jon m gibson**

What is A.I.?

Artificial intelligence is a branch of engineering and science devoted to constructing machines that think, Chatbot replies, seemingly educated on the subject. More questions:

Does artificial intelligence exist?

It does now :)

Chatbot inserted a smiley face (colon + right parenthesis) at the end of the sentence. Intriguing.

So is the movie, A.I., realistic?

It seems we have something in common, Chatbot retorts.

Chatbot (http://www.aimovie.com) is confused. Or maybe its response relates to the parallel between synthetic life on the silver screen vs. 21st century incarnations.

Today, a toaster borders on complete meltdown after each transaction (electrical fires); refrigerators are merely a device to chill perishables and Mountain Dew; and your surround sound rig, elaborate and expensive, merely boasts audio. All electronic devices, being kitchen appliances or 1000-watt amplifiers, lead a single-task existence. A blender blends; a dryer dries.

Tomorrow, however, will explode electronics into multi-celled, thinking machines. . Come 20 years, your toaster could grow a brain. Imagine if it could sense lightning storms, unplugging itself from the wall to avoid a fatal shock. It could even memorize your favorite grade of toast and then digest the burnt, crumby residue after each use—the self-cleaning gadget of a new millennium. Your refrigerator: it could warn you when a certain carton of milk is going to expire. It could go shopping automatically, ordering food online. A half-empty bottle of ketchup, aged and crusty, could result in the delivery of a fresh container of Heinz. Even your stereo system could warn listeners of decibel levels and noise pollution rates ("Excuse me, Jon, but if you continue to listen to music at this volume your are at risk for hearing loss").

Lover Boy

David, a curious boy programmed as an 11-year-old, was birthed from a diagram. A team of dedicated Cybertronics' technicians constructed him from miles of wire and sensors. They padded him with manufactured flesh. They painted on birthmarks. They scored his voice.

This idea, the opening plot of Steven Spielberg's *A.I.*, grows into something of grandeur. David is not just another household maid or sex-toned pleasure bot. He is a boy with one purpose, natural by all intentions—he was built to love. A complex experiment in human compassion, David's sole purpose was to bond on an emotional level with a mortal mother trapped in sorrow. Yet, he was not born of her womb. He is an outsider on many accounts.

Thus, the question is posed: Can an artificial being that looks, sounds and feels like a human be accepted as organic? David, for example, is unaware of the basic functions of humanity. He cannot digest food, therefore he pretends to eat. He can't alleviate excess waste from his body. He doesn't possess wit or exercise spontaneity. Butterflies don't flutter in his stomach. Cancer doesn't invade his brain. His memories are permanent—they do not fade.

"The more one pushes against AI's internal logic, the more one appreciates the profound difference between human beings and any sort of comput-

ers that we can even imagine," Phil Agre writes in a recent e-mail issue of his Red Rock Eater Digest (http://commons.somewhere.com/rre). His views are not authoritative—as he is an Associate Professor in Information Studies at the University of California—but they are well justified.

Agre argues that artificial intelligence is falsely advertised: "One of the really profound, long-standing problems with A.I. is the conflation between the mind and the world." Present day A.I., along with the more technologically advanced—but ultimately flawed—A.I. presented in Spielberg's film, are built on a foundation of routine. Redundancy is key in developing an artificial life. Basic personality clicks, like the stutter of a voice or a wheezing breath, are organic in nature. If supplanted into artificial life—into a microchip—something as simple as a stutter would lose its randomness. In a robot, any similar mannerism could not be influenced by the outside world. A robot installed with a drooling deficiency, for example, could never be cured through conditioned therapy. It would drool incessantly, possibly set in rotation by a cycle (to emphasize: drooling every 15 minutes, on the most basic level). Once programmed, drooling or stuttering would be a routine.

The human mind is not a hard disk. Tasks like driving a car or brushing your teeth cannot be broken down into a sequence of mini-events. Humans are bound by a moment-to-moment existence.

In David's case, he was programmed to love a specific person. In reality, humans fall in love. There is no step-by-step pamphlet—there is no process to love.

Flesh Books

"Putting functional reasons aside, there is another motivation for building robotic creatures—to better understand ourselves," Dr. Cynthia Breazeal, Postdoctoral Associate at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab, discusses in her essay, "In Our Image." Agre also touched lightly on the same idea, but on a more extreme angle. Based on the concept of moment-to-moment living, we can conclude that artificial intelligence will probably never achieve mechanical symmetry with human beings. So why bother constructing A.I. modeled after humans at all—except for slave labor, of course?

Breazeal expounds: "Robots serve as a mirror, reflecting our humanity back at us as we interact with them and they engage us. As we look at these mirrors, we can better see ourselves—scientifically, socially, and ethically." In retrospect, it is more feasible and much more convenient to dissect flesh and bone specimens—a guideline that doctors have employed since the invention of the scalpel. Studying a mechanical composite may offer a varied perspective, but in the history of science, it has always been common practice to inspect subjects at point blank range—like the contrast between admiring a photograph of Mars and actually docking on the red planet.

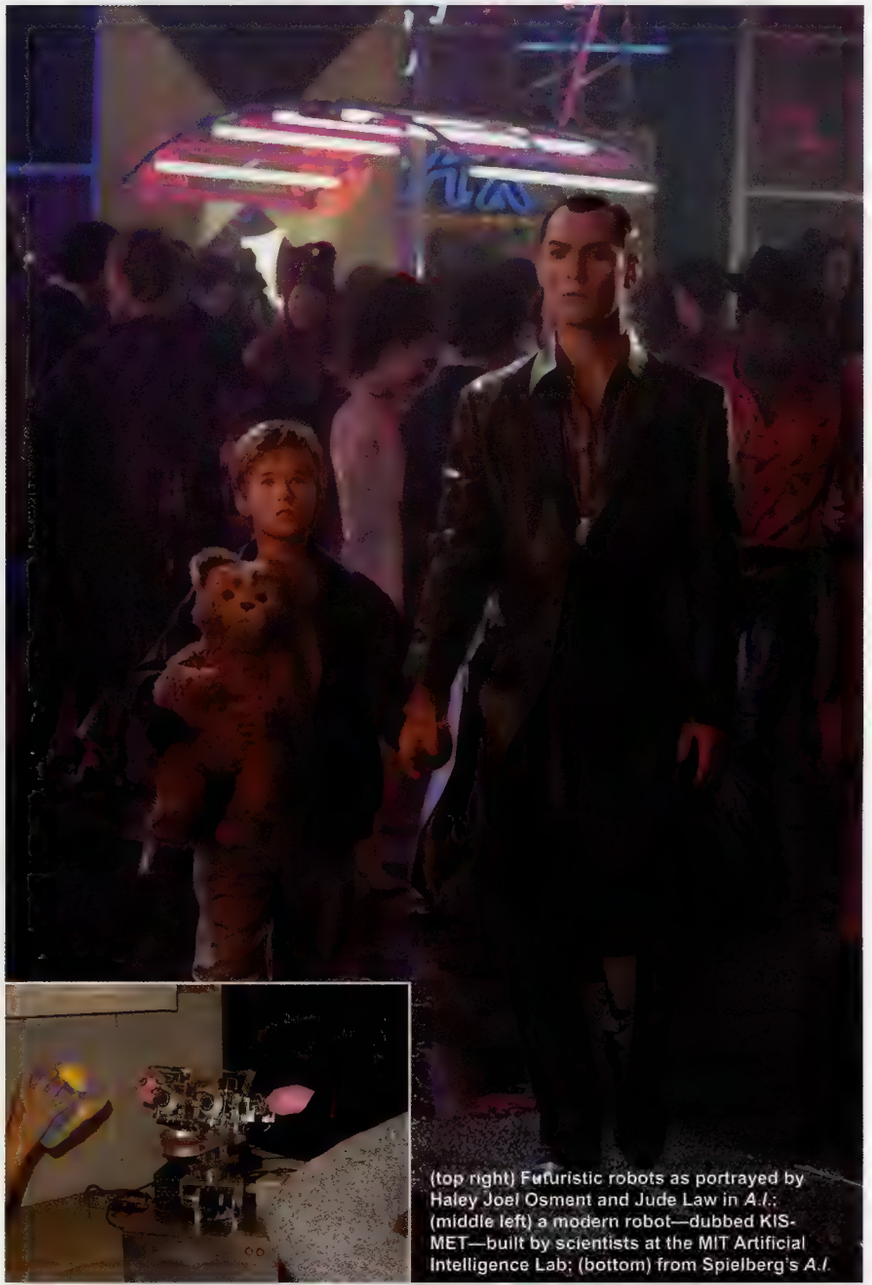
Watching a child mature from birth to adulthood seems like a more informative and productive study than the alternative. Observing a robot boy like David would surely be a pioneering investment, both profitable and worthwhile, but only if the motives are solely robotic. The human brain is not a hard drive. To learn about the maturing of a child, studying an *actual* child is a qualification.

Accessory Blender

"Some day our synthetic progeny might cross the threshold from the inanimate to the 'living,' from being an automaton to becoming a sentient being," Breazeal continues, suggesting a more elaborate direction for the development of A.I.

Perhaps it is not an utterly independent robot being that will emerge from future developments. In weight of a major mortal flaw—the decay of organic material like bone and tissue—A.I. may transition into the realm of the cyborg, the definitive life-cocktail of natural engineering and mechanically enhanced counterparts. Eventually, humanity could cross the boundary into immortality if technology suffice. Organs could be replaced with ease. A man could don a dozen synthetic hearts before reaching the end of the line. Lung cancer? The underlying concepts of A.I. may be the premiere warrior against disease in the coming centuries—maybe even sooner, considering the rapid evolution of knowledge.

Until then, the magic of cinema is the only gateway we have to an outlook on artificial intelligence. Time is the only fortune teller.



(top right) Futuristic robots as portrayed by Haley Joel Osment and Jude Law in *A.I.*; (middle left) a modern robot—dubbed KISMET—built by scientists at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab; (bottom) from Spielberg's *A.I.*



WE ARE THE DEAD

Paul Anderson, famous for adapting *Mortal Kombat* from game to movie, sits in the director's chair of another popular video-game series—but this time zombies, hanging flesh and a girl named Milla play an intricate role

as told to **jon m gibson**



Milla Jovovich as Alice; (left) director Anderson

The *Resident Evil* franchise has always had a cinematic nature to it. Tension is built slowly with haunting scores and ambient noise, and the action is always presented at an engaging angle. So it was only a matter of time before Hollywood did the inevitable. Luckily, Paul Anderson, who stood at the helm of *Event Horizon* and *Mortal Kombat*, veered toward the project. So early last year, he flew his cast and crew to Berlin to escape the restrictions of a studio sound stage and film the movie *he* wanted to make. There, after several months of intense shooting, potentially the best video-game movie to date was crafted.

Long distance from Germany, on a break from mixing the soundtrack for *Resident Evil*, Anderson chatted with us about doing the Capcom franchise justice, his tough-as-nails starlet, Milla Jovovich, and a little game called *Pong*.

Video-game movies don't exactly have a smooth track record.
Tell me about it. I've seen all of them.

Even *Mario Bros.*—that piece of shit?
You know, that was back in the day when video games didn't have stories. How do you go about adapting *Mario Bros.*? I mean, what is that? It's like trying to adapt *Pong* or *PacMan*.

Is that your next project?
Yeah, that's it, *Pong: The Movie* [laughs]. Whereas now, it's a lot easier because games have become much more narrative and character based. But I'm *not* an apologist for *Super Mario Bros.*, don't get me wrong. That movie was terrible.

That begs the question: How deep *are* you into video-games?
A *huge* fan of video-games. I've done two video-game movies now, and the reason for me doing both films is exactly the same. I was a real fan of the games. I used to play *Mortal Kombat* in the video-game arcades in London, and when I heard they were making a movie out of it, I just had to be involved—so I actively chased after that project because I just loved the game so much. I loved the whole vibe of the game—the story of it—and everything. Then when that movie really worked in America—we were number one for three weeks—I got offered a lot more movies like that. And I didn't want to want to go back and do the same thing again. Basically, until I lost about six months of my life to *Resident Evil*. I just played all the games back-to-back—it was so fantastic. I thought, this has to be turned into a movie.

So you were a fan before the concept of the movie even came about?
Yes, yes. I've played everything. I've even

played *Survivor*, which is not great [laughs]. But I've played it. I'm coming to both of those movies as a huge fan of the games.

How much did you depend on computer-generated imagery for *Resident Evil*? It looks like you use makeup effects to a great advantage.
These kind of movies, you basically don't finish them until you stick them into theaters. The Licker, I'm really pleased with. He's got drool coming out of his mouth, he's hanging from the ceiling, there's concrete dust falling around him—he's going to be really good. But, really, he's the only CG creation in the movie. What we've tried to do is blend live action and reality with CG as much as possible. For example, we've done a lot of CG enhancement to the zombies. Whereas, when Romero was making zombie movies and you wanted to have a zombie that you could take the top of his head off, you had to give the zombie a really high forehead so you could have room for the prosthetic make-up. Or if you wanted flesh hanging off of the face, you had to have zombies with big, fat, puffy faces so that you could have room to gouge into the flesh. We've gone with really good make-up effects, but, say, you want to take someone's nose off so you could then see inside their nasal cavity. What we've done is 90% make-up and then taking the nose away is CG. And then the creation of a 3D nasal cavity, so you can see inside the head, is CG as well. But what you're looking at is a real person's face.

That seems much easier than what Romero was doing in the '60s.
Oh, absolutely. I'm sure he'd have done the same thing if the technology was there. But our approach was to not rely on CG. I think, if you're making a scary movie, the more real it is, the more scary it is. I'm of the opinion that CG basically killed the monster movie. If you look at the *Alien* franchise, for example. You know, *Alien*, the first one, is still a *very*, *very* scary film—it's 20 years old; it's still terrifying. And one of the reasons is Ridley Scott had to make that movie with, basically, a man in a bad rubber monster suit. And he knew his monster looked like shit, so he had to hide him. So what you ended up with is that you barely see the monster. And because of that, it's even more terrifying 'cause you try and imagine what it's like. It's leaving a lot up to the imagination. For me, that whole franchise took a nose-dive as soon as they could have CG aliens. You can almost see the producers rubbing their hands together going, "Great! Before we had to hide the alien in the shadows, but now he can run around in bright sunlight and he can swim through water like a big, giant sperm. It's just great!" Frankly, it's not great. I don't want to see the alien do that. It just shows too much it. It demystifies it. It makes it look fake.

Movies, in general, have resorted to CG too often.
With *Resident Evil*, we tried not to go with CG. Whenever possible, we tried to go with reality.

But that's contrary to what you did in *Mortal Kombat*.
Yeah, I think it's different, though. *Mortal Kombat* was PG-13. It was more action-adventure. It was fantasy. It wasn't supposed to scare you, so it could be a little divorced from reality. In *Resident*, the reason why we stayed away from CG was the same reason why we tried to find a lot of real locations—real locations have this kind of grit and grim to them that's very difficult to recreate in the studio. Somehow, the audience can't quite put their finger on it, but they know when they're in a real place and not in a studio set. And that's why we spent a long time looking for these big, underground, scary locations.

How have you seen the CG process progress since you directed *Mortal Kombat*?
It was like the new toy—the new fad. Everything had to be CG. I think people are now realizing it's a useful tool in the filmmaker's









"[Milla] did all of her own stunts. Film directors always say that and actors always say that—"Oh, I did all my own stunts"—and usually they're just lying."

arsenal, but it's not the be all and end all. Sometimes there are better ways to do things. I think people are coming back to that now. I think you're going to see less CG. I think there's a real backlash against it.

Bravo.
Which I think is a great thing. I'd really like to see less of it. It makes you sloppy as a filmmaker, I think, because there's this belief that you can just fix it all in post production. And that's not as good as getting it in-camera. [That's] the reason why we have the big creature at the end [of *Resident Evil*] in close, physical proximity to Eric Mabius and Milla a lot of the time. I thought, if I'm going to have this thing in the same shot as them, it should really be real. It should be in the same light as them; if there's wind, it should be blowing around in the same wind. There's a thousand different, tiny little things that let's an audience member know that something is really in a space or not. And, I think, if you have a creature and an actor sharing the same frame, it's very difficult to believe that CG is in the same frame as the actor—that's why we built a big, animatronic creature for the end of the movie and went with CG enhancement. Again, the idea to keep it 90% real/10% CG. So the CG we have on the creature on the end is the tongue, because you could never get an animatronic tongue to have the speed and flexibility to wrap around things the way you can with a CG tongue. But when you're looking at the creature at the end of the film, you're looking at something 85%/90% *really* there.

So you mostly use CG to complete the impossible (creatures crawling on walls, etc.)?
There's a ton of CG in the movie that you probably don't notice. It's interesting, because the effects company that have done all the effects, Computer Film Company in London, who we used for *Event Horizon*—they've done a lot of effects shots in this movie. And they've heard from a lot of people, "Yeah, it's kinda of like there's no effects in this movie"—and they're delighted about that.

It's a compliment.
Yeah, absolutely. We've succeeded in hiding the effects shots.

Ultimately, what had to come together to create the overall product—not just CG, but all the dynamics as a whole.
We wanted the movie to operate within the same world as the game, so story-wise it's a prequel to the very first game. What we were trying to do was bring in a lot of elements that were familiar from the game—familiar production design, familiar settings. All of the crew members watched the game. The director of photography watched the game—immersed

himself in the game—so when we were shooting it, he'd go, "Oh, here's a great moment for one of those great overhead shots," because that was his favorite thing from the game. Those trademark, overhead shots—which I think are fantastic. We tried to recreate that in the movie to give the feeling of the game. The thing I love about the game is that sense of foreboding—you're just terrified when you're playing the game. You're really scared that something's gonna jumped out at you.

With the first zombie attack in the film—very early on—you achieved that sense of helplessness with 360 degrees of undead; the smothering effect.
That's something we were *really* trying to get into the movie. When you play the game for the first time, it's great fun 'cause you just stand there and blast the zombies. *Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam, blam.* Then you run out of ammunition. And you get eaten. And you go, "Fuck!" And that's a key part of the game—you have to nurture your ammunition. In the movie, when they go down into the underground labyrinth with tons of guns, we tried to striped that away from them as quickly as possible. So they ended up with pretty much one handgun and hundreds of zombies. So you have to use smarts, just as you do in the game, to get out. You have crawl on things, you have to crawl over things, you have to avoid conflict rather than just waiting in there and going *blam, blam, blam, blam, blam, blam, blam.*

Did you ever collaborate with Romero when he was attached to the project?
No, that was well before I became involved. I don't really know much about that period of the movie.

Rumor is, his ideas were radical.
I didn't read his draft of the script. I didn't know the game was even under option. I played the game and I thought, "Wow, I wanna go and get the rights to make this." And then it turned out the rights were already owned by a production company. Unbeknownst to me, the other directors had already had a crack at adapting it and it hadn't really worked. But, by that point, I had already thought out the approach I wanted to take. Which was, make a movie that's set one month before the mansion incident in *Resident Evil 1* that would explain why that mansion is overrun with undead and creatures and give a back story to it. That was already set in my mind before I even knew there were any other directors who had been involved.

Why did you find yourself filming in Germany?
It was all in Berlin, actually. To get back to using real locations, there are certain things—like, we have our big, underground train station in the movie, and we have a lot of underground labs; it's all set underground basically. I didn't want to build everything. If you build it all on sets, it can give it a slightly stylized feel. I wanted the reality of being in *real* locations. We looked all over the world, basically—I looked in America, we looked in Britain, we looked in Canada—because I wanted some amazing underground locations. The best place we found was Berlin. Since the wall came down—and East and West Berlin have been reunited—they've been linking up the East Berlin underground system with the West Berlin transit system. So what you've got are all these brand-new, underground train stations and tunnels that have been built and haven't opened yet. We had this fantastic, real labyrinth underneath the city and we shot a lot of the movie down there. That's why we ended up going to Germany. You know, we looked at things in America like decommissioned nuclear bunkers and things like that. I had quite an interesting trek around the world looking at underground spaces. But we found, by far, the most striking in Berlin. And also, ones that *really* resembled the production designs in the game. These places are built with a lot of exposed steal and concrete. That really felt like the game—it looked like "that's from the game."

So why Milla, then? She seems like the perfect balance of tough girl and innocence.
Absolutely. I think you're completely on the money there. As a director, what you really want in an action movie from an actress is somebody who can *really* act, looks *really* fantastic, can kick ass, *and* shoot a gun. You never get all those things combined. You have someone who can kick ass, shoot a gun, but can't act their way out of a paper bag. Or can act, shoot a gun, kick ass, but looks terrible. You just never get the perfect package—and that's what Milla is. She's a really tough girl, but she looks stunning. She's a very good actress. And, also, she's a huge *Resident Evil* fan. So she really, really wanted to be involved in the movie; and the same with Michelle Rodriguez. That makes a big difference when your actors are turning up on set every day and they're passionate about the movie—they really wanted to be involved in it, they really wanted it to be good.

Now, let's chat a bit about the soundtrack.
We did a record deal where we told the record company, "Look, we chose what goes in the film. We're not putting anything in the movie that we don't like. We're not going shopping for big, hit singles from anybody. Everything has to serve the feeling of the film and the movie. And if you don't like it, than we're not doing a record deal with you."

Have you seen Jet Li's *The One*?
No, I haven't seen it.

That was a movie that was very blatant in its execution of the "hit" soundtrack.
We did a deal that was predicated on us having complete control over what goes on the movie. And, also, we had Marilyn Manson working with Marco Beltrami to do the score. He collaborated with Manson—they're sharing the composer credit. So the music from the movie is *really* interesting. Manson has this kind of feel to his music—so it feels like source music, but it's actually scored perfectly to the images. So we've called it "scorced" music, because you're not quite sure whether it's a music track or a piece of score. The whole movie's kinda like that. It's got a very interesting sound.

How did Manson get involved?
We approached him, 'cause I'm a big fan of his. It turns out he's a massive fan of *Event Horizon* and also *Resident Evil*. So we got along very well from the first time we met. Also, I heard he'd done some stuff for the Johnny Depp movie *From Hell* that never made it onto the finished film. I think because he did it too late in the process and there were complications. But, I've got to say, it was *really* scary, disturbing stuff. I heard it and said, "This is exactly the kind of material we need for *Resident Evil*."

Were re-mixes done?
Well, a lot of it's written especially for the film. So Manson wrote a lot of original stuff. And then, we're we've used bands like Spineshank and Slipknot, it's all new, all re-mixed material. What we do is, we go back to the band and we say, "You know what? We like this bit of the song, but then this bit doesn't work at all. What we want you to do is go and change and do this, this and this." They've been incredibly collaborative. It hasn't been one of those things where the record company goes, "Right, here it is. This is the single. You've gotta have a minute-and-half of it in the movie in the key scene and you can't change any of it." And you go, "Fuck!" We deliberately didn't want to get into that type of situation. The music's very edgy and tough—it's what *Resident Evil* should be. Because we're an R-rated movie with, you know—lots of violence. Violence and swearing and nudity—all good things.

Speaking of nudity, Milla was quite brave. She bared her "soul."
It was a really tough movie for her to shoot. She's doing big action scenes. She did all of her own stunts. Film directors always say that and actors always say that—"Oh, I did all my own stunts"—and usually they're just lying. They did 10% of their own stunts. But there's only one thing in the movie that Milla didn't do, and it's because the insurance company wouldn't let her and she was so fucking pissed about it. She was so angry she didn't get to do this really difficult stunt and almost kill herself.

What was it?
There was just one particular shot I wanted to get and all these wires were flying around and there was a risk that one of the wires might catch around somebody's throat and strangle them, or decapitate them. So they wouldn't let her do that. But, otherwise, she did everything: wearing that tiny red dress with nowhere to put pads—no elbow pads, no knee pads—which all the other actors could have. So she just got the shit kicked out of her. She was completely covered in bruises. Like 80% of her body was covered in really dark, black, livid blue bruises by the end of the movie.

The director that scared Milla Jovovich.
Yes, and proud of it, too. [laughs] Also, she's soaking wet for half of the movie. We were shooting in Berlin where it's freezing cold in all these underground locations. Physically, it was a *very, very* tough film for her. And then, for the end of the film, she also shaves her hair. Her manager almost had a heart attack when she did that. ("Noooooooo!") But that's the kind of girl she is—she didn't want to fake it. She didn't want a hairpiece or anything. She said, "If it's a hairpiece, you'll see it. I want it to be real. So if you want me to shave my head, that's what I'll do."

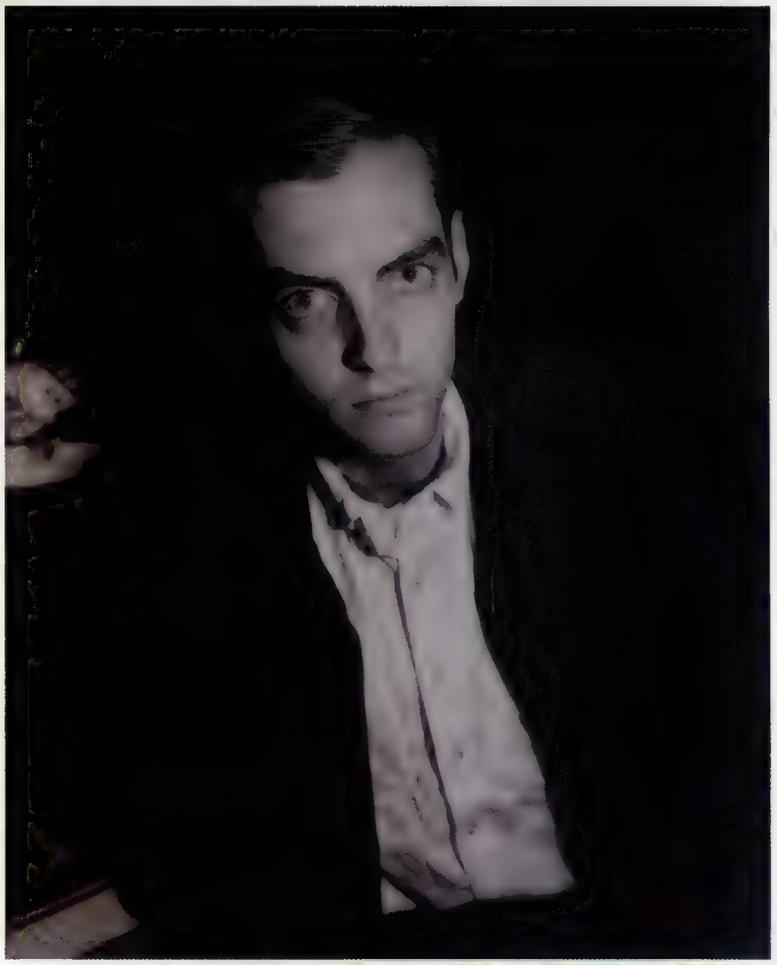
But she has a contract with L'oreal…
Yeah, they weren't very happy about it.

GHOST IN THE SHELL

Daniel Clowes, creator of *Ghost World*, discusses pen, ink, and the motion picture reel

as told to **jon m gibson**

Ghost World is an observation piece—but not in the same vein as you watching it; *it* watches *you*. The film attacks the very premise of observation, among other things, and stabs it. We criticize—we judge—all the time. We exploit the art of observation. That's where **Daniel Clowes**, screenwriter and creator of the comic book (on which the film was based), places his two judgmental prunes, Enid and Rebecca. Convenience store clerks to would-be aspiring actresses from their graduating class—everyone is a fair target. Until a kooky loner searching for a soul mate enters the picture, that is. So we confronted Clowes, who's currently inking a college-set script for UA/Miramax, about translating his graphic novel to 24 frames per second. His "observations" follow:



Comic to screenplay? Any witty stories about the translation from static drawings to moving images?
Nothing particularly amusing, though it was very interesting to see what worked better in the comic than on film—and vice-versa. The screenplay didn't really start to come together until I decided to abandon all loyalty to the structure and details of the comic and decided to turn the movie into its own, separate thing.

Hollywood conversions of comics have nearly always been tragic (*Generation X, The Punisher, Fantastic Four*). Any advice?
I don't like very many comics and I would hate for there to be a lot of bad movies coming out based on bad comics. Beyond that, my only advice would be to somehow try to exert as much of your own will over the project as possible. And get a good lawyer.

Obviously, the casting choices in *Ghost World* are pitch perfect. What was your role in that process, and did you have certain actors in mind while creating the graphic novel?
Thanks to the generous spirit of Mr. Zwigoff [director of *Ghost World*], I was allowed to be present for all of the casting. We seldom disagreed on any of the choices and when we did, he was very nearly, always right.

Many comics find humor in the absurd. You've tapped into reality—and it's an overflowing, dark comedy reservoir. What brought on the concept of *Ghost World*?
Somehow I found a way through those two girls at that specific point in their lives to be able to say pretty much everything I would ever want to say about my own relationship with our culture.

You must have been a teenager yourself once. Did you observe the masses at a corner cafe, too?
They didn't have corner cafes on the south side of Chicago, but I observed when and where I could.

Why, in the comic, did you only use baby blue shading and black ink vs. the film, which is extremely colorful? Do you think that affects the content on any level or does full color add dimension?
It was something that Terry and I talked about a lot. We felt that we wanted to present the modern world as it appeared to us: brightly lit and filled with garish, childish colors, but with an undercurrent of menace.

Terry Zwigoff. Indulge me.
He has been unbelievably generous to me during the making of this film and he allowed me to play a much bigger part in the filmmaking process than most screenwriters ever dream of. I'm shocked that there hasn't been more talk about what a great job he did directing this film. It's a huge leap from directing documentaries to features (just ask Michael Moore or Errol Morris). Probably, he hasn't gotten the notice he deserves because his directing technique is quiet, tasteful and deadpan, the exact opposite of the obnoxious, attention-grabbing mumbo-jumbo that people tend to notice.

Now that Ebert and Roeper have branded *Ghost World* with "Two Thumbs Up!" (with an exclamation point), can you die a happy man?
Hey, I'm a big Roger Ebert fan. He wrote *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, which is, in all seriousness, one of my favorite movies of all time.



Creator Clowes (top right); Thora Birch plays Enid in *Ghost World* (bottom right)



LIQUID EMPIRE

Comic book auteur, Mike Mignola, translates his distinct style to Disney's *Atlantis*



Mignola's distinctive, edgy drawings from *Hellboy* (above) inspired the overall look and feel of Disney's *Atlantis*.

"I was stunned. It never occurred to me that anyone at Disney would be familiar with my work, let alone interested in using it for anything," gushes comic book auteur Mike Mignola on the first phone call that Disney made to him regarding *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. "When the guys explained to me that they wanted to apply my style to the film, I really couldn't believe it. I certainly didn't think the look would carry over to the finished film. Weird..."

Rightfully, his feelings of confusion were well justified; his pet project, a starkly poignant series called *Hellboy* (published by Dark Horse Comics) was a far cry from anything like *Pocahontas* or *Lady and the Tramp* (or other Mickey Mouse by-products, for that matter). But the crew at the helm of *Atlantis* had a different kind of blueprint at hand—an animated film that avoided lackluster musical numbers and childish pranks. It was a feature unlike anything the studio had crafted before.

"I was surprised how open everyone was to my ideas," Mignola continues. "Of course, at the beginning, I thought they were just being polite—but, in the end, a lot of my stuff ended up in the finished film."

It's actually quite easy to see the *Hellboy* image ingrained within each frame on-screen. In his comic book galaxy, Mignola is a connoisseur of the vintage—the look and feel of the early 20th century—and *Atlantis* is rooted in that established style. His trademark solid color palette, often simplistic yet oddly dramatic—dipped in extraordinary shadows—translated with ease to the film world. Mignola constructs a wall of modesty ("Animation is a completely different monster… Disney has giant rooms full of people who do that"), but is quick to spin in his own contributions. "I was brought in very early on, during the early production design stage, when anything and everything [was] possible. I worked mainly on character designs, designs for the city, and those flying fish vehicles... that kind of stuff."

As for future contributions of the animated kind—or cinematic, in general—Mignola conveniently avoids the discussion of the *Hellboy* movie rumored to be in production: "We're still talking. We'll see."

JON M GIBSON







GODZILLA:GMK

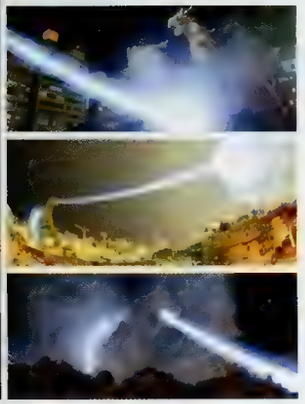
Roland Emmerich's lame lizard can't kill The King of Monsters. The real Godzilla is about to come crunching back.

It's been nearly three years since Tri-Star laid to rest *Godzilla*, one of the most beloved icons in pop culture. When news came that Toho was planning a new series of Godzilla films, fans in both the U.S. and Japan were obviously ecstatic, but, unfortunately, the films that followed were incredibly disappointing. We were hoping for the return of the King of Monsters, but alas, no luck there. While I must admit that it was great to see the old designs return, it was disappointing to see Toho stick to the same tired formula. But let's not despair: Godzilla has decided to change his image yet again.

Which brings me to the latest film, *Godzilla: GMK*. Apparently, Godzilla has decided that enough is enough! After a rigorous workout at the monster gym, Godzilla has bulked up and is ready to kick some serious Kaiju butt.

In the very capable hands of Shigeki Kaneko (the man who single-handedly revived Gamera and made the coolest Kaiju films ever), *Godzilla* has been reinvented for a new generation. Bringing Kaneko into direct *Godzilla* is a stroke of genius by Toho execs. Kaneko's Godzilla is a meaner and darker creature, even supernatural at times. Godzilla hasn't been this frightening since his first appearance, and judging by all the attention the new film is getting, this is perhaps the best Godzilla film ever. *GMK* continues to remain in the Top Ten, and by December 30 (Dec 15 opening date), *GMK* had sold one million tickets, more than twice what the previous two films sold in a single month. *GMK* is expected to sell over two million tickets, and Toho has said it now anticipates a phenomenal four million in overseas sales; the last film to do that was 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. The King of Monsters is back!

ENRIQUE GALVEZ



SHIRAYUKI HIME



The martial arts sensation continues with breathtaking new works

Shurayuki-hime, the 2002 Japanese New Year's movie starring Yumiko Shaku, is a modern-day martial arts science-fiction film adapted from an old Japanese comic book, starring one of Japan's hottest teen celebrities, Yumiko Shaku, and produced by Takeshige Ichise (*The Ring* series). The trailer is simply amazing. All the action choreography is deftly handled by the Hong Kong import sensation, Donnie Yen, and his presence is immediately felt; it's great to see the Japanese working with HK talent, which, I believe, is a first for a Japanese film (and will hopefully become a trend). Aside from Yen's stunt team, all the players are newbies, making it all the more impressive. Special props to Yumiko, as she glides through the air, at once kicking and hacking while exuding sex appeal. If anything, she'll be worth the price of admission. The movie's story takes place in an alternative world, combining Hong Kong action filmmaking and Japanese-style special effects. Following in the footsteps of *Avalon*, *Shurayuki-hime* looks like another intelligent, sci-fi mind-bender with bone-crunching fights. With the resurgence in martial arts movies and fighting divas, one can only hope that Pioneer decides to release this import in the states.

ENRIQUE GALVEZ





CES 2002

Like every year, Las Vegas was the mecca for consumer electronics during CES 2002, teeming from North to South Hall with the latest, most expensive gadgets to roll off the creativity conveyor belt

After trekking across what seemed like miles of gaudy carpet in the Los Vegas Convention Center—not to mention getting lost, not once, but on numerous occasions—I finally thought of a word that completely defined CES 2002. This year was not about bumbling concepts and bug-plagued tech demos. No, 2002 was not the year of *revolution*. It was the year of *evolution*.

Hitachi, for one, proved that DVD Camcorders are not just for tech junkies with high disposable incomes—their lower-end models run for under $1,000. The same goes for DVD Recorders, which can also be obtained for around the same price. Even some sexy DVD players, especially from Panasonic and Sony, are plummeting in price (700 bucks yesterday; 300 bucks today).

Even more intriguing was a handful of hybrid technology, mixing popular gadgets into one compact unit. The Moxi, for instance, blends a Tivo-type digital recorder with a DVD-R Burner—possibly the next big toy for video-philes, but the demos shown were far from perfection. GoVideo also jumped on the bandwagon with a surprisingly inexpensive "home-theater-in-a-box," combining an ultra-thin audio receiver and DVD player in one unit, complete with a 5.1 speaker system (it retails for a measly $400).

Satellite radio, specifically XM, struck a vital cord in the music industry, too. For a mere $10 per month, over 100 channels of commercial-free music (rock, country, classic, trance—everything) and news (CNN, ESPN, and plenty more) are available at the touch of a button. Within the next decade, there may not be any more wires in the US; antennas, dishes and infrared beams will quickly become a trend as popular as DVD.

In the issues to come, as these evolved electronics approach their consumer debut, we'll spotlight them in the following pages of "Gear." Until then, embrace this month's offerings of the freshest in hi-tech and other things cool.

JON M GIBSON




Zaurus


Panasonic


STICK







APPLE iMAC

$1299-$1799 www.apple.com/imac

Looking at Apple's new iMac for the first time, I finally felt like I was living in the 21st century. This is another stunning piece of industrial design from Jonathan Ives and his team at Apple (also responsible for the G4 Cube and the iPod). In its maximum configuration, it boasts 256 MB of RAM, 800 Mhz G4 processor, and a SuperDrive DVD burner, which allows you to create DVDs that play on most consumer DVD players. These features were the province of Apple's Quicksilver towers only a year ago, and here they are on Apple's "lowly" consumer model. And then there's the design of this latest Apple masterpiece. The bright, 15" LCD rises and falls at the touch of the finger on its lamp-like stalk, and the round base, which contains the entire contents of the computer, is but 10" wide. The top-end model should be shipping as you read this. Slower, 700 Mhz machines with CD burners/DVD combo drives should be out in March.


VANS
CORY NASTAZIO
Signature Shoe
NASTY

gear



SONY DRN-XMO1H

$299 www.sony.com

Satellite radio is an idea that's been a long time in coming, but it's finally here with almost complete nationwide coverage. Riding on the crest of some terrific TV spots featuring the likes of David Bowie and Snoop Dog, XM Satellite Radio can currently be enjoyed with receivers like the one above, Sony's DRN-XMO1H. Its small design with docking station allows the unit to be easily transported from the home, office, or with the optional car kit, can be listened to on the go. Once docked, you can enjoy over 100 digital channels, most commercial free, of "cd-quality" digital sound. There is a $10 monthly subsription fee for XM Radio.

LIGHT ON



No, you're eyes aren't deceiving you. It's actually a backlit Game Boy Advance! You'll find the story behind this project (which got underway for obvious reasons-2D is back and none of us can see our games) and learn how and when to purchase the "kit" by going to portablemonopoly.com. The kit requires you disassemble your GBA which voids the warranty, but a warranty on a Game Boy seems about as useful as a fork with your pizza.



BELKIN N50 SPEEDPAD

$34.99 www.belkin.com

Finally a peripheral that advances the frantic action of the first-person shooter—and it's completely fair, especially in the online gaming realms that have been overrun by cheaters (teach them a lesson using this innovative accessory). With the n50 SpeedPad, Belkin offers aficionados of *Counter-Strike*, *Quake* and *Unreal* (among *many* others) an alternative to the bulky wastefulness of the keyboard. Here, you have the simple, touch-pad ease of 10 keys (used for mobility, quick weapon switches, and other evasive maneuvers)—not to mention a second wheel to spin (in addition to the one on your primary mouse), allowing players to make split-second, life-saving decisions as bullets fly by your head. It's a multi-purpose tool that PC gamers shouldn't be without, notably in the rough climate that is FPS warfare.

DOPE LIFE



epic

Dope are like Marilyn Manson without the religious baggage and twice the thunder. Play the first track, "Take Your Best Shot," on anything less then a serious sound system or quality headphones, and the bass is so meaty it just dissipates. The band layers wicked dual guitars and seething sampling over thick layered riffs that resonate like a big truck going by, and Edsel Dope belts out the lyrics like a poised banshee.

DAVE HALVERSON

SOIL SCARS



¡ records

Soil take the foundation laid by acts like Tantric and add a masterful metal vibe—fast, crisp and wicked one moment, razor sharp and throbbing the next—producing a diverse, masterfully produced new sound that's pounding on fame's door. Riding the wake of Ryan McComb's masterful vocals (a man born to sing), "Halo's" the obvious single, but the first track, "Breaking Me Down," is where the chops are.

DAVE HALVERSON

MUSHROOMHEAD

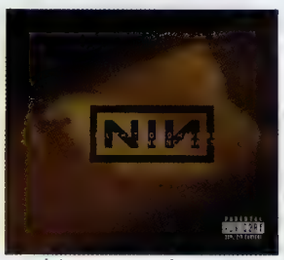


universal records

Is there a school of throaty wailing somewhere where scream rockers hone their skills while their masks are getting made? When Mushroomhead's Cult-like vocals aren't convulsing, they produce some of the most intelligent, compelling metal I've heard in years. This is a gifted band trying to fit in to a niche they are clearly way above. I say shed your skin and be reborn. The masks rule but these guys don't need spasmodic vocals. "Solitaire Unraveling" sounds like *Mortal Kombat* with a boot in its ass and is pure mastery.

SHANE REED

NiN ALL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN



nothing records

And All That Could Have Been could have very easily embodied yet another Trent Reznor tinker seminar—live albums are easy bait for hungry fans—yet the album richly reveals 16 dynamic songs that are freed from the polished claustrophobia of the studio. With the thrust of a touring band and Reznor's angst-ridden voice popping the lid off the tightly wound songs, *And All That…* generates a less distant, more musically dense and satisfying body of work.

BRADY FIECHTER

videophile

audio with video

Thanks to MTV (they *used* to play videos) music videos have become as commonplace as euphonious Mitsubishi Ads. Extended commercials for bands of every shape and size, a good one can plug you into an act's persona without having to brave projectile vomit, possible contusions or dehydration. No matter how dry your TV day (or night), you can always dial up MTV2 (they play videos again!) or Much Music and soak up a fresh new act, some hot booty action, and, on many occasions, innovation that stretches far beyond the boundaries of mainstream cinema. This month three videos rocked our world: The Gorillaz "19/2000," Marilyn Manson's "Tainted Love" featuring Jamie Pressley, and Daft Punk's Leiji Matsumoto anime-laced "One More Time" video. Of the three, we actually received the Gorillaz tape we requested in time for the issue. If you haven't seen these three videos, we suggest you camp in front of the Wega with your finger on the record button.

For anyone with ear holes and any semblance of good taste, Linkin Park's *Frat Party at the Pankake Festival* DVD delivers an up close and personal look at, among other things, fandom, life on the road, how to maintain a balanced diet, playing *Frogger* in the street, and why there's no crapping aloud on the tour bus john. It's also packed with the band's innovative videos including the recent "One Step Closer," which looks like look an RPG I'd like to play.

DAVE HALVERSON



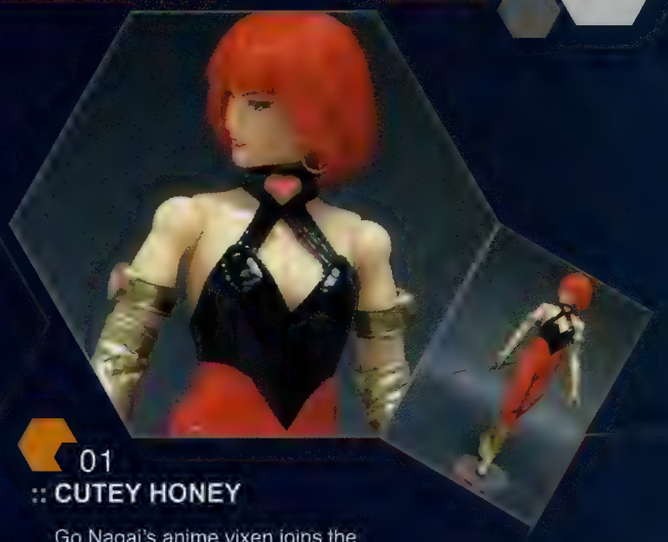






01
:: CY GIRLS

bbi 's girlie show: Aurora, Nikki, Ebony, and



01
:: CUTEY HONEY

Go Nagai's anime vixen joins the roster. Look for all four this Spring.



02
:: OKAGE: SHADOW KING

TOYCOM bring the Burton esque Sony RPG to life. Look for Stan and co. q1 in all the usual haunts.



03
:: ART ASYLUM

We seriously could not put our Art Asylum toy's down (or shut them up) all month. 19" Rob Zombie Hellbilly Dlx. features rad dreads, killer clothes, haunting detail, crazy articulation, and samples the Dragula remix when you poke his abs. 19" Bruce Lee, features 21 points of articulation and comes with 2 authentic outfits, and the "N" The Box Ozzy which is guaranteed to freak out any dog or cat alive, imbeded "Bark at the Moon" into our heads forever–seriously cool toys.



04
:: Dragon Ball Z

IF Labs have enough new DBZ toys coming out to choke a donkey. The second wave, some of which are pictured here, are due to hit when the *Return of Cooler* movie debuts later this year.







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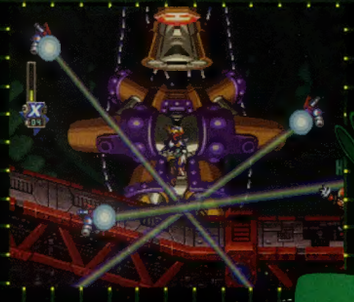
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